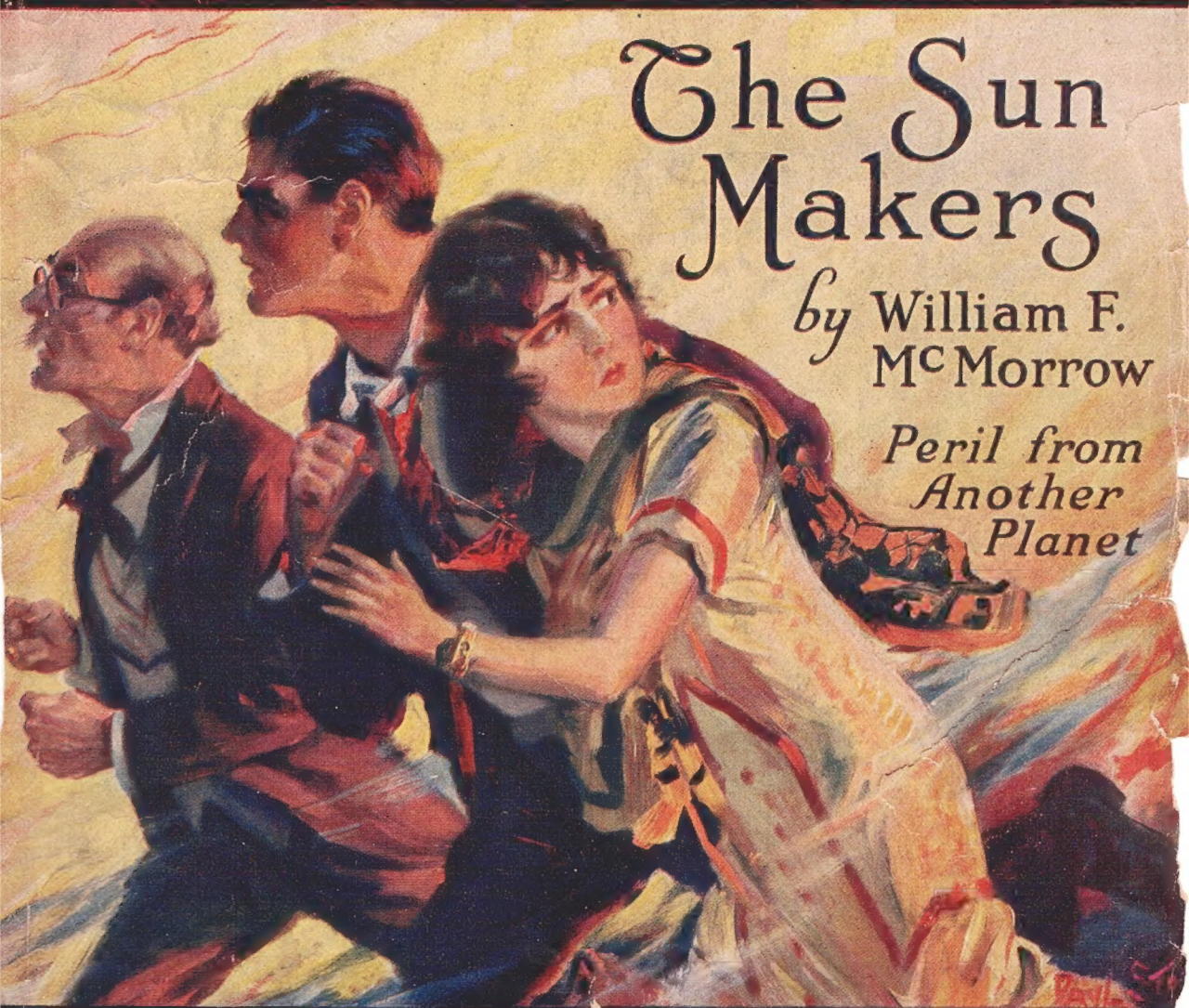


ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

The Sun Makers

by William F.
McMorrow

*Peril from
Another
Planet*



10¢ PER
COPY

NOVEMBER 21

BY THE YEAR \$4.00

8 Men out of 10 Picked the Duofold Blindfolded

From 11 New Pens of Different Makes



"I believe that the hand can tell this super-smooth writer sight unseen,"
declared a Duofold owner—and he proved it!

YES, ten men, chosen at random, agreed to make this test and were blindfolded. One by one, in the presence of several witnesses, they were handed 11 large new pens of different makes, obtained from pen dealers' stocks.

Each man wrote with all 11 pens on an ordinary note pad. And one by one he laid them all aside until only a single pen remained in his hand—the pen he ranked as the smoothest, most inspiring writer.

Then the blindfold was removed. And man after man, with but two exceptions, glanced down to behold in his hand the flashing black-tipped lacquer-red Parker Duofold, with the point guaranteed, if not misused, for 25 years.

Never before a pen selection so unbiased as this. No one behind a counter to urge this pen or that. Not even the Duofold's famed name or handsome color visible, to sway the hand's Simon-pure judgment.

You, too, can tell this super-smooth point with your eyes shut. Step to the nearest pen counter now and try it.

THE PARKER PEN COMPANY, JANESVILLE, WIS.

NEW YORK • CHICAGO Duofold Pencils to match the Pens SAN FRANCISCO
Lady, \$3; Over-size Jr., \$3.50; "Big Brother" Over-size, \$4

THE PARKER FOUNTAIN PEN COMPANY, LIMITED, TORONTO, CANADA
THE PARKER PEN CO., LIMITED, 2 AND 3 NORFOLK ST., STRAND, LONDON, ENGLAND

Parker *LUCKY CURVE*
Duofold *OVER-SIZE*
With The **25 Year Point** **\$7**

Duofold Jr. \$5
Intermediate size

Lady Duofold \$5
With ring for chatelaine

Red and Black
Color Combination
Reg. Trade Mark
U.S. Pat. Office



*Reveals the beauty
of the Scarlet
Tanager*

**Choose
Your Point**

*Extra fine
fine
medium
Broad
Stub
Oblique*



Doubled His Salary Overnight and the Firm Was Glad to Pay It

He was just a clerk in the Traffic Department of a big packing house.

In his spare time he studied the LaSalle course in Traffic Management. During his working hours he applied his new-found knowledge to the problems of his every-day job.

On certain Pacific Coast shipments his firm was paying a rate of \$1.60 a hundredweight. This man discovered a ruling which entitled the firm to a rate of \$1.53 a hundredweight. By filing proper claims, his firm recovered more than \$200,000.

Figure out for yourself what such a service did to that young man's salary!

Can you make savings for your firm or in your field which would justify doubling your salary?

How You Can Fit Yourself for a Big Promotion and Big Responsibilities

This is a true experience and it was the stepping stone to bigger and bigger opportunities. The man in question is now Traffic Manager of the largest cement company in the world. His experience illustrates the unusual opportunity which Traffic Management affords a man to *show results* and create new opportunities for himself.

Here's another LaSalle-trained man—Traffic Manager for an automobile manufacturer. Before he came to this manufacturer, it had been the practice to return "automobile car decking racks" to the factory all-rail. The rate was \$3.22½ a hundredweight. This man lined up an ocean-and-rail rate of \$1.81, and saves his company on this item alone between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year. Just a single example, but typical of hundreds of opportunities which the trained traffic man has to show why he is *worth big money*.

Traffic Management—A Field of Unlimited Opportunities

Are such opportunities for you? Can you do what thousands of others are doing every day? Can you

honestly tell yourself that you "haven't a chance," when big corporations are paying their Traffic Managers \$5,000, \$7,000, \$10,000 a year, and over twice this last amount?

Only 2c and two minutes stand between you and the answer to these important questions.

Simply indicate on the coupon the field in which you desire success, and we will send you without cost a book describing the LaSalle salary-doubling plan and the opportunities in that field.

Can you afford to turn the page without making this slight effort to insure your business future?

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The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Dept. 1132-TR

Chicago, Illinois

Please send outline of your salary-doubling plan, together with a copy of "Traffic Management," also copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.

☐ **Traffic Management—
How Traffic Men Make Money**

Other LaSalle Opportunities

The LaSalle plan opens the way to success in every important field of business. Check below the opportunity that appeals to you.

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Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXXIII

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NUMBER 3

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Here is another splendid novel by a truly gifted writer

Her Hour of Reckoning

By Elizabeth York Miller

A sword of retribution swung low from the desert's mirage
to menace a woman with pinioned arms and shackled feet.

First of four fascinating installments next week.

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Feel like a New Man in Two Minutes

Amazing Restoration in SPINE-MOTION



HOBART BRADSTREET
65 Years Young

YOU never give a thought to that spine of yours, do you? If you did you would be another man altogether. You'd have twice the energy you have—twice the strength and stamina. You'd pitch into your work with the avidity of a boy for play. You'd revel in anything that meant activity. You'd be a superman compared to what you are.

But, vital as it is, you pay no attention to your spine. What are the consequences?

A word about the spine will explain.

The spine is a series of small bones placed one above the other. Between each pair of bones (vertebrae) is a cartilage which acts as a cushion or shock absorber, taking up the weight and shocks thrown on the spinal column as we stand or walk. Since nothing in the ordinary activities of us humans stretches the spine, these once soft and resilient pads are flattened down, become thin and hard. One's spine then does not absorb the shocks sustained but transmits them straight to the base of the brain. Then come headaches—backaches—"nerves"—insomnia—habitual tiredness. We have not one-half the force and "pep" we should have. We do not get the joy out of work or play we should. We are only about 50 per cent efficient.

When the cartilage is worn down to a certain point, nerve impingement may result. That is, two of the vertebrae may curve so close together as to "pinch" or press upon a nerve leading from the spinal column to an organ which the nerve controls. Then there is trouble! If the impinged nerve has to do with the liver, then liver trouble. If with the stomach, stomach trouble. If with the bowels, constipation. And so on.

Why the Spine Needs Stretching

The spine needs the peculiar motion, the flexing, the laxation, it would get if we lived as man primeval did, in order to loosen up the spine—to "elongate" it—to take the burden off the cartilage and the pressure off the nerves. No amount of violent exercise will do the trick, we know from experience, for often the most inveterate gymnast is a striking case of sub-laxation of the spine.

From my 25-year experience with spinal mechanics, I have evolved a method of SPINE-MOTION which seems to be the answer to the problem. My method of "laxating" the spine is a simple, boiled-down formula of just five movements. Neither takes more

than one minute, so the whole process means but five minutes a day. But those movements, simple as they are, bring a wonderful change—almost instantly! I have had many people come to me saying they were in perfect health and wanted to try my motion just out of curiosity, only to be amazed with the feeling of new exhilaration experienced in one execution of my spinal-motions. Only the other day a prominent Chicago business man, known as a human dynamo, remarked to me after a few days of my system, "I didn't realize until now that I was only 50 per cent alive."

I have seen my spinal motions put sick people on their feet in a few days. I have seen many a chronic case of headache, nervousness, stomach trouble and constipation completely relieved in a matter of weeks. Speaking of constipation, I have one motion—a peculiar, writhing and twisting movement—that will, in fifteen minutes, in nine cases out of ten, bring a complete evacuation.

I Promise You Startling Results

I know that there is something in my method for everyone, and I invite everyone to try it. I invite the young and the apparently "vigorous" to see what difference spine motion will make in their energies and capacities. I invite the ailing to see the direct relation between spinal mechanics and health. I invite men who are ageing prematurely to put to test my statement that a man's powers (in every sense) by nature, should continue full flush up to the age of 60, being only a matter of a sound nerve-mechanism.

No "apparatus" is required with my method. Just my few simple instructions made doubly

clear by my photograph poses of the five positions.

Send No Money

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HOBART BRADSTREET, Suite 6985
630 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I will try your SPINE-MOTION without risk if you will provide necessary instructions. Send everything postpaid without any charge or obligation, and I will try it five days. If I find SPINE-MOTION highly beneficial I can remit just \$3 in full payment; otherwise I will return the material and will owe you nothing.

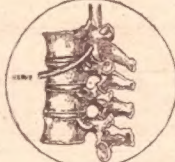
Name.....

Address.....

Why You Must Keep Your Spine "ELONGATED"



How bones close in on the delicate nerves when the spine "settles," shriveling the nerves and draining vitality.



How "elongating" the spine keeps the bones apart and the nerves full and free to perform their functions.

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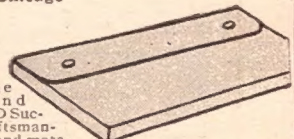
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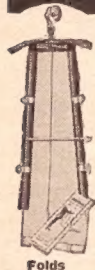


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AGENTS



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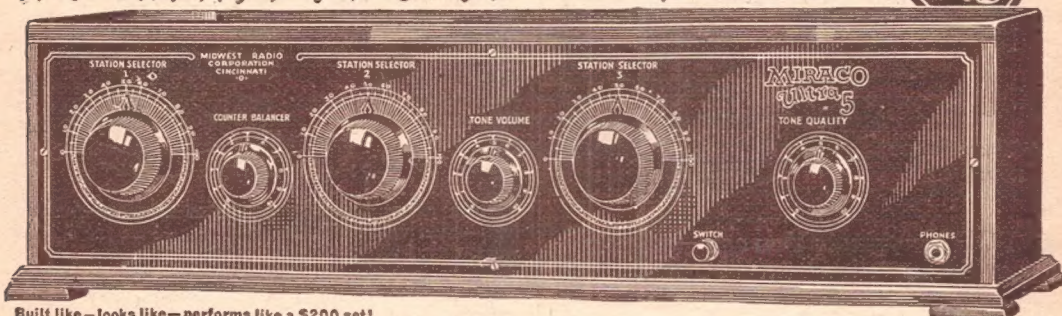
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Notice!

Tremendous demand for this big, beautiful, powerful, 1928 model Miraco Ultra 5—as a result of users everywhere so highly recommending it to their friends—makes possible the hosts of costly new features and latest improvements such as you expect to find only on sets at much higher prices.

COAST TO COAST RECEPTION VERIFIED BY USERS
 Reports from Ultra-5 users everywhere leave little for us to add. These are only a few of the thousands in our files and which we receive daily:

MANY SAY IT'S BEST THEY'VE HEARD

"Ultra 5" more than meets my expectations of a good radio set. Many think it is the best that they have heard. For volume, selectivity, clearness and long distance it is unsurpassed in my estimation. . . . Auto Supply, Alton, Ill.

PRaises THE FINE TONE AND VOLUME

The Ultra-5 has a fine tone and good volume; last night had several stations from 8 to 10—all on loud speaker. D. C. . . . Macon, New York.

THE TONE IS "WONDERFULLY CLEAR AND POWERFUL"

Am more than pleased with 5 tube Miraco. Tone wonderfully clear and powerful. D. C. . . . Detroit, Michigan.

MORE PRAISE FOR MIRACO TONE QUALITY

The Ultra-5 received from you is the best I ever heard of. It must be that the MIRACO is every way as represented by you. George . . . Maanaka, Ill.

ONE OF THE CLEAREST EVER HEARD

All who have heard my Ultra-5 set pronounce it one of the clearest they have heard. And I must say that the MIRACO is every way as represented by you. George . . . Colville, Washington.

MONTANA HEARS BOTH COASTS

Ultra-5 set is C. S. Have got them New York to Los Angeles; Winnipeg to Dallas, Texas. W. . . . Polson, Montana.

CHIO GETS NEW COAST TO COAST

We are enjoying the Ultra-5 Radio. It is all you recommended. We get stations on the east coast, south and west coast. H. . . . Huron, Ohio.

CALIFORNIA THE FIRST NIGHT

Headphones are not necessary with the Ultra-5. I had KFI, California, the first night with some volume as Pittsburgh. Fred G. . . . Lapeer, Ohio.

COAST TO COAST FROM OKLAHOMA

With Miraco five tube set am getting stations on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Yerkes E. . . . Pauls Valley, Okla.

"COAST TO COAST" A REALITY

The two Miraco-5s and that it works fine. Had fine time in fact far beyond our expectations. Very statement of "coast to coast" reception proved absolutely a reality. E. B. . . . Bismarck, Texas.

MICHIGAN GETS COAST TO COAST

I am overly pleased with the Miraco Ultra-5. Can get stations from coast to coast and from Texas to Canada. Geo. G. . . . Gordon, Michigan.

LOTS OF VOLUME—20 STATIONS FIRST NIGHT

Will drop you a few lines to let you know that I received my Miraco Ultra-5 and that it works fine. Had 20 stations the first night—it has lots of volume. Fred . . . Veradale, Ill.

The reports we print are from UNSOLICITED letters sent us by pleased users.

INDIANA HEARS BOTH COASTS

Miraco Ultra-5 is a first-class set in every respect. It can't possibly be beat for the price. The first night received 20 stations from both coasts. Adolph M. . . . Indianapolis, Ind.

MINNESOTA HEARS COAST TO COAST

Received Ultra-5 in fine condition. Have received programs from stations all over the United States and Canada. We find it is one of the best sets in this locality. We are well pleased with the wonderful results. Clarence . . . Nashua, Minn.

HEARS CALIFORNIA TO EUROPE

Enclosed is a partial list of the stations I received with the Miraco Ultra-5. W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

WISCONSIN HEARS BOTH COASTS

W. . . . Waukegan, Wis.

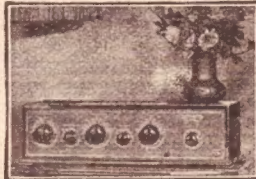
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The improved new Miraco Ultra 5 is a beauty! Handsomely gold-etched genuine Formica panel and large bakelite knobs with "arrow point" indicators (for sharp tuning) add to the stylish appearance. A big set—27 inches long!

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Write for the new Miraco proposition. Nation-wide popularity of Miraco sets coupled with their prices make them a money-making proposition. Let testimony of users convince you. Write for literature and Special Offer—use coupon.



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXXIII

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1925

NUMBER 3



The Sun-Makers

By WILLIAM F. McMORROW

CHAPTER I.

ROSSEY EXPLAINS THE EARTHQUAKE.

I HAD not seen Rossey in seven years, and I would have liked to sit over our coffee with him and smoke a retrospective cigar and talk of old times; his dinner had been excellent and his cigars were above reproach—he knew how to live in those matters—but he would not let me. He insisted on taking me up to the observatory on the roof of his country-house near Hastings-on-Hudson, and make me look at confounded stars and talk scientific nonsense to me.

A man with a hobby, I thought as I puffed at the match he held to the excellent cigar, is a bore. Especially is a man a bore who has a senseless hobby like astronomy.

He talked sensibly enough of most things; people like that often do, on subjects other than their hobbies. Every one used to know the Rossey Sprinkler System in those days. This was the same James Rossey. He had a business seven years before that was worth a million dollars, and he had sold it out, and taken to looking up in the air with a spy-glass—when, if he'd stuck to business, the chances were all that

he would have been worth two millions at the end of the seven years, or at least a million and a half.

He is a thin and fussy man, a bundle of nerves; wonderfully energetic for all his fifty-seven years.

"Hurry up, Hardiman!" he said, fidgeting over me.

He glanced at the tall windows of the dining-room, which overlooked a lawn running steeply to the river.

"It is getting dark and it's just about right to observe Venus."

He grasped my arm and walked me up three flights to his observatory.

"This is all right, Rossey," I said, looking around me and rubbing my hands as though I meant it. "You have quite a plant up here."

"Not bad for an amateur," he said, fussing with an enormous telescope. "There's a Troughton & Simms' transit instrument that's not half bad. This telescope is a reflecting equatorial—cost me eighteen thousand dollars."

"Humph," I said, looking at the instrument with more respect. It was as big as a six-inch gun. "Well, Rossey, I'm not up on telescopes particularly, but I judge that one's a stem-winder."

He was sighting through a little telescope that lay along the back of the big one. I cast about for remarks. I suppose I knew as much about astronomy as the average man, although I never had been a crank on it. But often, when I have been looking up at the sky I have had a feeling of how wonderful it all is and that I must brush up on it a little.

"What was the reason for that earthquake not long ago, Rossey, that made such a fuss in the eastern states? The papers were full of it? Mrs. Hardiman and I were sitting on the porch that night, after we put the radio to bed. We were looking at the moon, I remember, and having quite an argument over whether it was a man or a woman in it when the thing happened.

"There was some talk about rocks sliding around in the middle of the earth but I don't put any stock in that newspaper talk. I told her I'd ask you about it. And what's all this talk about a woman in the

moon? Is that one of those fool popular notions or is there something in it?"

But he just went on fussing with his little spy-glass and then he jumps down and squints through the big one.

"There it is now!" he cried in excitement. "Take a look! No—close the other eye—if you must!"

I sat in the chair and looked and saw the moon as plain as could be, but somehow or other I could not even see the man in the moon let alone the lady, through that telescope. And I was surprised to see that it was the new moon, whereas last night I had seen it full.

"Great!" I said, waving my hand.

"That instrument magnifies four thousand times," he said, pleasedly. "There are only two larger in this country. You see it well, don't you? It is in its inferior conjunction and is at its nearest to the earth. It is twenty-six million miles away, and that glass brings it within six thousand miles of your eye more or less."

"More or less," I agreed. "If a thing is six thousand miles away it does not make much difference, I suppose, whether it is a little more or less. That is about the same as though a man in San Francisco was to look out his window at Tokyo—a little more or less would not cut a figure."

"That's the idea," he nodded. "I suppose you know that it is more like the earth than any other planet in the solar system. That is, its size, situation and density, in the figure of her orbit and in the amount of light and heat which she receives from the sun."

"Is there a man or woman in it?" I asked after looking in vain.

"That is a most interesting question," he said. "That is, to say, the question of intelligent life or the nature of the intelligent life which is there! It would be unscientific to think that it was uninhabited; the same natural forces are at work there as here."

He gestured toward the horizon.

"It is only men's natural vanity that leads them to think no other reasoning being exists outside the earth. With reference to the planet in question I should say it is very improbable that any creatures which we would recognize as men

are living on it, although it is unthinkable that intelligent beings do not inhabit it—beings, possibly, far more intelligent than ourselves."

"My wife says there is a woman in it," I put in. "I can only see a man even if he is not so plain just now."

"What do you suppose you are looking at, Hardiman?" he asked after a moment's silence. "You are looking at the planet Venus!"

"You mean—a *star*?" I asked, taking my eye away from the telescope to get this right.

"Of course not. The sun is a star and stars are suns. Venus is a planet—a cool, non-luminous body like the moon or the earth."

"Let me have another look," I said, squinting through the eye-piece again. "Do you know I think you are right! So you think there are people living over there, do you? How is it I never heard of this before? I remember reading in the papers one Sunday about people living in canals somewhere—Mars I think—but I did not even take stock enough in that talk to go outside and have a look for myself. But I never heard that Venus was much account."

"That is because Venus is the evening star," he said. "It is always low on the horizon, and the only time it can be observed is just after sunset or in the early morning, and it is hard to see clearly then because the sun is near it. It is between us and the sun so that we have to look into the eye of the sun, almost, to see Venus whereas Mars is further away from the sun than we are, and we turn our backs to the sun to look at it. That is why we can see Mars better, although it is smaller than Venus and further away."

"It is a strange world," he said into my ear. "In the winter on Venus it is much colder than our North Pole, and in the summer it is about two hundred in the shade. What kind of people do you suppose could stand a climate like that? Its highest mountain is twenty-seven miles high. They have a great deal of wind and rain."

"What do they think of us?" I asked, humoring him.

"The earth is the brightest star in

the sky of Venus," he said promptly. "You understand that I use the word 'star' in the popular sense. There can be no doubt that the astronomers on Venus spend much more time studying our earth than they do studying any other heavenly body. They have no moon, by the way. As a matter of fact there is every reason to suppose that the creatures who live up there are watching us this blessed minute, just as you are watching them."

"Oh, get out!" I said. "You don't really believe that, do you, Rossey? Why, it gives me a sort of an uneasy feeling! What do you suppose we look like to them?"

"It isn't a question of supposing," he said, rather tartly. "You well-to-do people should spend more of your time and money on science and less on a ruinous and silly competition in servants and automobiles. Then you wouldn't use the word 'suppose' in relation to astronomy. It is the most exact of sciences."

I made a soothing noise and nodded.

"We are a great, blue star to the Venusians," he continued, "and we appear so bright in their sky that we cast a dark shadow! Our continents and seas are apparent to their telescopes of very ordinary power; with an instrument such as this they could see the City of New York."

I took another squint.

"It's getting harder to see every minute. Doesn't it ever get up higher than that?"

"Certainly—in the day-time. That is what I told you; that they see us perfectly because we are directly over their heads in their night, which is our day; whereas we see them only in the morning in the East just before sunrise, and in the evening as they follow the sun down behind our horizon. Their world can be seen in our day-time too, with a telescope—and with the naked eye every seventh year when it is brightest."

"Very interesting," I said, straightening up and re-lighting my cigar. "Now how about the earthquake and the man in the moon?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you haven't heard?" he conjectured, with a certain caution in his tone.

"Heard what?"

"About the connection the earthquake had with a big explosion in Germany several years ago and about a so-called aerolite that fell near Toronto last week."

"I remember an explosion of a nitrate plant in Germany that killed a thousand people and wiped out a couple of towns. That was some time ago. That had nothing to do with the earthquake, did it?"

"Nitrate plant," he chuckled. "If it fell in Central Park the wiseacres would say the reservoir blew up. Highly explosive substance—water is—under certain conditions! Queer coincidence that the color of the flames, as reported by the few lucky ones, happened to be the color that shows off best against a pale blue. Much queerer coincidence that your earthquake tallied to the second with that strange disturbance Anderson out at the Lick Observatory reported as occurring on Mount Galileo on Venus."

"What in the world do you mean?" I asked.

"And the great tidal wave in Chile the autumn following the explosion in Germany. I remember the newspapers made quite a thrilling story out of the Atlantic sucking down into a hole in the ocean bed and then spouting back again. Wiped out several towns there, too."

"What has that got to do—" But he was off to a flying start.

"That coincided with the time of the great sun-spot and also with the extraordinary variation of the moon's orbit," he said. "I don't need to tell you, I hope, that the sun is just a blazing ball of incandescent material and that the moon—to the best of our knowledge—is a dead and uninhabited world. But both of them vitally affect the earth! The sun-spot affected our magnetism and the variation in the moon's path affected our gravitation. Here there were two natural phenomena and just as they were exerting their greatest effect on us, something which was not a natural phenomenon occurred on a planet which we believe to be inhabited!

"We thought there might be a connection between these several events—that the activity on Venus might be aimed

against the earth because we are the nearest and most accessible planet to them—"

"What is all this?" I interrupted in turn. "I don't make head or tail of it!"

He nodded with an irritating air of pity.

"I suppose not," he said, patting me on the shoulder. "And I couldn't explain it to you in less than a month. But you must have heard something of the Toronto aerolite. But first let me tell you that the explosion in Germany, now forgotten by almost everyone, was, to our minds, the result of that disturbance on Mount Galileo in Venus."

"We think it was in the nature of an experiment; the flash of the explosion could easily have been seen on Venus. As to the mass of molten metal that fell at Toronto—it was sawed open after cooling and cavities were found in it. In those cavities were pieces of carbon which showed an animal structure under the microscope. A fragment of this carbon was vaporized and the glowing vapor subjected to spectroscopic analysis."

"All this of course was done by astronomers who had no ax to grind and no reason to seek publicity so that you hear it now for the first time. But the point is that the analysis showed up in 'D,' the unmistakable double black line!"

He looked at me in a sort of owlish triumph.

"What in thunder are you talking about, Rossey?" I asked, laughing.

He stared at me in the dim light from the lamp suspended above us and I saw his pleasure turn to dissatisfaction.

"Nothing," he said, somewhat sulkily.

"Oh, come on," I said, handsomely. "Tell me all about the double black line in 'D.' You're not tiring me a bit; in fact I'm awfully anxious to learn about those things. What is the double black line in 'D,' Rossey?"

"The light of only one heavenly body shows that line under the spectroscope, showing that an unknown gas is present in its atmosphere; we call that line 'Venusite' because that heavenly body that exhibits it is Venus! Do you understand now?"

"You mean—"

"Yes! That so-called meteor undoubt-

edly came from Venus and when it left that planet there was some kind of animal inside that aerolite."

"Let's have another look," I said, going to the telescope again. "Now I have it. There's a bright crescent, like the new moon, and there is something like the old moon in the new moon's arms, only brighter. What is that, Rossey?"

"That is one of the mysteries of the planet," he said, just as happy to show his ignorance. "You mean that ashy light between the arms of the crescent, I suppose. We don't know what that is. It is caused by something on the dark surface of the planet. It is probably some kind of artificial light, unless they have some way of reflecting light from the sunny side. The bright crescent, you understand, is the sunlight. If you will picture to yourself the sun as it is now, below and behind Venus, you can see how it would just light up a rim of it for us."

It had grown quite dark and the Star of Evening was sunk below the Western horizon.

"Let's go down and get a drink," I suggested. "All this talking has made me infernally dry."

He went himself to the cellar to fetch the liquor; Mrs. Rossey and I waited in the billiard-room. I pushed the balls idly about on the table. The game is Rossey's favorite, although he is a better mathematician than he is a billiard-player.

"Do you think there is anything in it?" she asked suddenly.

"In what, Mrs. Rossey?" I asked, while studying a new position.

"In all this talk about Venus. There has been such a time over it! Mr. Rossey is constantly in the observatory and sends and receives a dozen telegrams every day to and from other observers. I was so glad to see you this afternoon; I hoped you would take his mind off this queer affair for a few hours. It's just one of his notions isn't it, Mr. Hardiman?"

"That's it," I assured her with confidence. "Take him into New York and let him see a couple of good Broadway shows and sport around for a while and you'll see he'll forget all about it and laugh

at himself for taking stock in such nonsense.

"I get that way myself sometimes when I attend too closely to business and I find the only thing to do is to get away from it for a while. It's all imagination, you may depend on it, Mrs. Rossey. Why, he wanted to tell me upstairs how the weather was on Venus. That was a pretty large order, wasn't it?"

"I am so glad to hear you say so, Mr. Hardiman," she said.

"There is a great deal of bosh about this astronomy," I went on. "I studied it up quite a bit when I was a boy. It is just a theory and you know how these scientific theories keep changing and every time they are quite sure that now they are right."

"You sound so sensible, Mr. Hardiman," she cried. "It is a positive relief to listen to you."

"Well, Mrs. Rossey," I said, making a difficult cross-cushion, "I am a plain business-man and I do not claim any credit except for using plain common-sense."

"What do these Venusians look like?" I asked Rossey, smiling aside at his wife, when he came back with the bottle. If you oppose a man too much on one of these pet notions he is liable to get pig-headed but if you humor him he will begin to apologize and the first thing you know he will see that he is a little bit off his chump.

"That largely depends on whether they come from the region of heat or cold," he said, frowning reflectively. "Their world does not revolve on itself like the earth; it does not revolve at all! It is like the moon—the same face is always turned toward the earth. It is terrifically hot on the sunny side and as extremely cold on the other. I imagine, judging by the analogy of the earth, that intelligent life will be found on the sunny side, in which event we must expect that they are peculiarly constituted creatures who can live in a climate hot enough to boil water."

"Peculiar is the word," I agreed, filling my glass.

"Their atmosphere is very heavy and wet; I imagine they will be some kind of birds."

"Birds!" I said. "Well, well!"

"How is Mr. Rossey?" asked my wife when I arrived home that evening.

"He looks well," I said, "but he seems to be a little touched. He had quite a high temperature on the brain."

"A temperature?" repeated my wife.

"How much was it, Frank?"

"About two hundred in the shade," I said.

"Goodness!" exclaimed my wife. "But what is there in that to laugh at?"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHIRLING MACHINE.

I LIVED in those days in Westchester County, in a suburban development called Thermopylae, in an eight-room house on four lots. It was about eighteen miles out of New York City and was between Pelham Manor and the city line.

The next day was Saturday and it was raining so I telephoned in to the office and dropped around to our village library and looked over some works on astronomy. I did not make much sense out of them and I decided it was their fault; I have always been a man accustomed to bank on my own judgment and I have found that when I do not understand what a man is driving at it is generally because he does not know himself.

When a man gets to be thirty-seven, which I was then, he can look back on a number of things and say to himself that he was a very stupid fellow not to see them coming. There was, for instance, the European war of 1914-1918. I was a jobber in steam-fitters' and plumbers' supplies and I did some export business, and I noticed how keen competition was and how most firms would almost commit murder to get trade and how quick the governments were to send around a warship to back up some private business-man who did not think the foreigners were giving him a square deal.

Anybody could see, you would think, that it was only a matter of time before some government would knock a chip off somebody's shoulder and they would be

fighting all over the map. But we didn't see it coming. Outside a few good orders I picked up in the beginning I got nothing out of it and lost six months' time in a training-camp without getting across besides.

I do not blame ordinary people for not seeing the trouble coming from Venus but I do blame the experts in that line, the professional astronomers. Very few of them were like my friend Rossey. There was a man named Lowell out in Flagstaff who laid out a map of Venus, showing various straight lines on it that could not be made in the course of human nature and must have been some kind of structures made by the inhabitants; and there was one Pickering, who looked over the stars for signs of life and found plenty. But most of the professionals pooh-poohed these men and said it was all in their eyes.

The favorite argument of these professionals, according to these books in our library, was that the other planets were either too hot or too cold for human beings to live on. That is the kind of an argument an Eskimo would make if you described Africa to him and told him people lived there. And, for that matter, I do not know any human being that could stand our climate around New York.

When winter came around those very astronomers who said Mars was too cold would get into a steam-heated flat and hug the radiator which is proof enough that the earth was too cold for them, too. And I have never noticed them basking in the sunshine in the summer. Or they say that the air is too thick or too thin on the other planets; well, we have air and water on this earth and I notice that the air is too thin for a fish and water a bit too thick for us.

So I closed these books and asked Miss Fetherson, our librarian, for something funny and she gave me a book of essays by a man called Simeon Newcome. It was published in 1906 and one essay was entitled "The Future of Human Flight." I got several good laughs out of it. He proved up to the handle that men were never going to fly, and said that if you multiply the square of the diameter by the sector of the distance and divide the result

by 3.1416 you could perceive the facts for yourself.

Perhaps I have not got his equation just right as I did not think it worth while to memorize, although he said it was quite important.

He said that the only way for men to fly was to harness a lot of birds and be carried up in a sling. If I ever get on a school board I am going to see that the youngsters study the works of Simeon Newcome and a good work on astrology and a map of the world made in the fifteenth century and some natural history out of Herodotus and if possible the minutes of the meeting of the board of aldermen that decided that Columbus was a dreamer. It will be great training for the boys and girls and they will learn that they must think for themselves and take the professionals with a large pinch of salt.

At that time, however, these books convinced me that my friend Rossey was seeing things; and I was just as well satisfied, as it would be bad business if people were going to worry about the stars. In my time I have seen business-men put in charge of a committee for doing and thinking things half as queer.

I went home and set to planting bush-beans in my garden, the weather having cleared up. We were very fond of beans; Mrs. Hardiman had a recipe for a bean salad that was a winner—she put olive oil on them and sugar and vinegar and I do not know what else and we were very fond of them that way.

We sat on the porch again after dinner and watched the moon come up over our cherry tree and talked about it and this and that. I enjoyed discussing such subjects with Mrs. Hardiman and got more pleasure out of it than talking with experts as they always had cut-and-dried opinions and you must take them or leave them.

"Do you hear a peculiar noise?" she asked after awhile.

I listened. "No," I said.

"I guess it is in my head," she said. "It must be the quinine I took. It is like as though it was a boat away out there on the water. It is a sort of bumming. I have heard it off and on for the last hour."

"Maybe they are firing the big guns at Sandy Hook," I suggested.

"It is something like that," she agreed. "Only it is more like a train going over a trestle very far off."

During the night I woke up suddenly and raised my head up onto my elbow and began to listen and I do not know what it was that woke me; but I could not hear anything. She was sleeping alongside me and I was going to wake her but I thought I would not as she is sometimes cross if she is awakened without a good explanation.

My next door neighbor in seven rooms on three lots, was Captain Marlin. He used to be the skipper of the Rockville Center, one of the ferry-boats of the Long Island Railroad cruising between Long Island City and Thirty-fourth Street in Manhattan to and fro across the East River. He made a fine figure of an old sea-dog as he stood on the head-land at the foot of our street, clad in a brass-trimmed hat and a long blue coat and swept the rolling meadows with his spy-glass. Most of the former commuters still living will remember Captain Marlin; many of them chipped in to buy him that set of nautical instruments of which he was so proud—the quadrant and the sextant and the rest including the spy-glass—which were presented to him with a neat address in memory of the time the Rockville Center had lost its bearings in a fog and had sailed down the stream and had made a land-fall at the Battery wherefore they had gotten to their offices safe and sound but two hours late.

"There was a terrible storm somewheres last night," he said, approaching the privet hedge which I was clipping after returning from church.

"Where was it?" I asked respectfully. The captain had charge of the weather for our neighborhood.

"I don't rightly know," he admitted. "I've been looking over the report in the paper and there's no mention of a storm but there certainly was one somewhere and it was a rip-snorter! My compass swung off to nor' nor' west at midnight and stayed there for half an hour and I never saw anything to patch that in all my years afloat."

"Maybe your compass was out of whack," I ventured.

"No, sir!" he frowned. "The earth was out of whack last night, that's what! I could hear those old magnetic vibrations as loud as surf on the Long Island south shore."

That evening I took Mrs. Hardiman up to New Rochelle to see the movies. Afterward we dropped in to see the new yacht club concerning which there was great discussion, one faction of the town wanting it in one location and another wanting it somewhere else, and still a third party not wanting any at all. I was one of those in favor of moving it to Thermopylae and had quite a discussion with a man named White who was in favor of scrapping the whole thing and trying to get our money back that we had subscribed.

The third party got what they wanted in the end for the next day, Monday, the Whirling Machine came down from the sky.

Captain Marlin saw it first with his famous spy-glass when it was still a brilliant point of light in the blue vault.

I had slept uneasily and fretfully through the night and rose early; I could not imagine what I had eaten that had disagreed with me. I went for a walk before breakfast, taking the road along East Chester creek that leads to Mount Vernon. I had a slight headache from my sleepless night.

I noticed the peculiar behavior of the birds; there was a flock of pigeons on Garvin's lawn in front of the hotel and when I approached them they did not take to wing but ran and fluttered over the grass as though unable to fly. I could have caught any of them in my hands. I think they were listening to the whistle of the Whirling Machine, which was keyed so high at the time that my ears could not catch it. As you know they use captive bats, besides microphones, nowadays to detect the approach of any similar danger; bats, they tell me, have unusually acute hearing; they steer themselves in the dark by the faint sounds reflected from surrounding objects. I don't vouch for this but so they say.

When I returned to our street again from the creek road the whistling was quite plain. To put it that way gives a poor idea of the

sound. If you have ever heard a thousand factory sirens going at once you know that the sound is really a kind of silence and it is only when it stops or changes or when you notice that there are no other sounds that you become aware of the screaming din. And you will have experienced the peculiar uneasiness that the approach of the Whirling Machine produced. It was as if you were out in the open in the presence of danger and could find no place to hide.

Captain Marlin was standing at the foot of the street with his glass to his eye.

"What is that infernal noise?" I asked him peevishly.

"Look," he said, handing me the glass. "See what you can make of it."

I peered through the glass. At first I saw nothing but the blue vault and then I saw a shining mote floating an infinite distance up in the ocean of air.

"Do you think that thing is making it?" I asked, still gazing through the tube. "And what do you think it is?"

"That's it fast enough," he said.

I thought he was right. I've noticed that when a sound is far off you can place the direction of it but when you get quite near it you lose it; it's just the opposite with a smell which you can find easily when you're near its source but which you can't locate at all when you are away off no matter how strong it is. A great many people like myself had their senses sharpened for them in the days that followed that Monday.

"What do you make out of it—you?" I persisted.

"I guess it's one of those new helicopter airships from Belgium," he said. "I read in the papers last week that there was one coming over here bought by the government."

"Helicopter," I repeated, consideringly; and already I had to almost shout to hear my own voice.

"Some such name they call it," he said, putting his glass under his arm and stumping away. Mrs. Marlin had come out on her back porch and had called to him after giving a single fleeting glance upward as though to rebuke whatever silliness had diverted her husband from his waiting breakfast.

"And do you think *that* is more important than to have our eggs burnt to a crisp?" I heard her say as she shepherded him past the open screen door.

"What *is* it?" asked my wife anxiously as I entered the house.

"An airship that the government bought in Belgium," I said.

"Oh, what a shame!" she exclaimed. "And I suppose those foreigners never told our people what an awful noise it made! You ought to write to your congressman about this, Frank."

The noise was now the kind produced by a buzz-saw which is eating its way through a knot in a log—a sustained and deafening shriek.

My wife endured it with compressed lips through breakfast. She came into the hall as I was taking my hat from the rack on my way to the station.

"This is too much of a good thing!" she said, indignantly. "Somebody ought to make a complaint about it—the idea of those people making such a time! I suppose they think we should be waiting for them with a reception committee; if I had my way they would be marched straight to the station-house the minute they landed and given a good fine for their noise!"

"It is rather an imposition and that's a fact," I agreed, glancing through the doorway. "Hello—there they are up there now!"

I walked out to the porch; Mrs. Hardiman went back to the kitchen to wash up the breakfast things with a remark that she would not encourage those Belgians.

The Whirling Machine was suspended in the air about half a mile up and over the point where the Sound meets the creek. I thought it was perfectly still though I know now that it was spinning with great speed. It was of bluish gray, except where the sunlight glanced with almost undiminished brightness from a line down its polished side. Its shape was that of a top and from where I stood looked to be about one hundred feet from crown to point and a scant sixty feet in its greatest diameter.

The neighbors were standing on their porches and in the paths leading to their front gates, and craning their necks to see

the strange thing in the sky. They cried to one another that it was the new airship that the government had bought and that it had flown across the Atlantic from Antwerp.

Mrs. Marlin came to her door, drawn thither against her will by the captain. She was a vixenish woman of about sixty.

She looked up in the air for a long moment and then her jaws snapped and she turned and stalked back into her house.

"Nonsense!" she cried out loudly. "I don't believe it! John, come inside this minute and don't make a big fool out of yourself!"

The Whirling Machine drifted in from over the Sound until it was nearly directly above us; it moved as smoothly as though it were wafted onward by a gentle zephyr. And then suddenly it seemed to shoot earthward.

"It's falling!"

"There it goes!"

"That's the way with all these blamed foreign inventions," cried Captain Marlin to me, as he hobbled past on his way to view the wreck. "They always end in a bust-up. I do hope and trust there were no Americans on that fool ship!"

But the Whirling Machine had not been wrecked. I saw it standing upright in a field as I walked down to the station to catch the 8.39 to town. I would have liked to have had a better look at it but I had no time to waste on amusement.

The afternoon editions of the papers carried front-page stories about the new Belgian airship. One of them in a neat box, bordered with tiny American flags, had a few words of greeting from the captain of the airship to the people of America, in which the captain said that he liked the Americans, thought the American woman the best dressed woman in the world, denounced prohibition and hoped his trip would increase the spirit of good-will and friendship between the United States and Belgium. And one of them—a poor and failing sheet—printed a dispatch from Washington to the effect that the American Government had not bought any airships in Belgium and knew nothing whatever about the matter. There was also an ob-

scure mention of the fact that radio fans had complained of extraordinary "static" for the past forty-eight hours.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST BLOW.

I RETURNED to Thermopylae on the 5.15 as usual, arriving at the station at a quarter to six. The three taxicab drivers had a new cry for the occasion but I did not see that they were getting any unusual custom.

"Take y'out to see the airship, boss? This way to the Belgian airship!"

I walked up Woodrow Wilson Boulevard—our settlement was as new as that—and passed the field in which the Whirling Machine had alighted. It was summer and the sun was still high over the horizon.

Hank Garvin, who owned the field, was making hay while the sun shone, as the saying goes. Hank was one of the old residents. He had farmed the site of Thermopylae before the suburban developer had appeared. He had held out this ten acre field from the sale of the village site hoping to get the advantage of the increase of land value and sell it off in building plots some day at a fancy price. Meanwhile he rented it out as a fair grounds and to the circus that visited us each summer, and he grazed three cows in it between times.

Now he was patrolling its split-rail fence with a club trying to keep boys out—which he was not succeeding in doing—and collecting quarters from other sight-seers who wanted to approach the "Airship" and were too dignified to dodge about him and defy him as the boys had done. A scattering fringe of youngsters were gathered about the Whirling Machine throwing stones at it, with a watchful eye out for Hank, who, they supposed, owned it.

I took Mrs. Hardiman down to see the local sensation after dinner.

"It fell right into your lap, didn't it, Hank?" I said, congratulatingly as I paid him his toll of fifty cents and escorted my wife through the gap in the fence at which he stood guard.

"People think everything is clear profit," he mumbled, munching his fine-cut as he made change. "Costs a sight of money to bring an attraction like this clear over from Yurrap."

"The expense must be terrible on you," I said, winking at Mrs. Hardiman. "You paid them to come here, did you?"

"Didn't exactly pay 'em," he admitted. "But they're using my property, ain't they? I calculate they had ought to pay the taxes anyway. I'm waiting around to tell 'em so soon as they ever come out of that there thing."

"Do you mean to say they haven't opened the affair up yet?" I asked.

"No, sir—they ain't. I guess they seen me a-waitin' here and they're watching their chance to duck away in the dark. I'm figuring on throwing a cable over the blamed thing and keeping them here until they pay me for the damage they done to that field but it's so smooth all over that I don't see nothing to tie onto. You ought to see the hole they knocked in the ground—must be fifteen feet deep—when they came down.

He darted toward the fence.

"Here, you young Peters, get back over that fence or I'll tell your pap on you!"

We walked up to the Whirling Machine.

It seems unbelievable now to me when I think of it. If we had known what was inside that machine we would as lief have walked up to a raging lion—I am sure we would have chosen the lion.

I imagine the crowd had kept at a respectful distance earlier in the day but now that the huge, shining thing had towered over them all day, motionless, their timidity had passed. They crowded around it, tapping it with their fingers, prodding it with umbrellas and sticks and an enterprising youth was trying to scratch his initials on the smooth surface with a pen-knife.

It didn't seem worth the half-dollar to get close to it. It was like paying to stand close to a blank wall. So I watched, with satisfaction, the perspiring young man in greasy overalls trying to make an impression on the hard surface. It looked like aluminium. Presently he broke the blade of his pen-knife and cursed and went off to complain to Hank.

We followed as this promised to be interesting.

However, Hank had troubles of his own. Late arrivals had come in too fast for him and through gaps in the fence several hundred more people had flowed into his field. Along the road was a line of automobiles and here and there family groups were seated on the grass with Thermos bottles and heaps of sandwiches in the center. A peanut roaster and a pop-corn wagon had appeared from nowhere.

With the help of several recruits Hank was busy roping off a space around the Whirling Machine and pushing the curious back. A young man wearing a straw hat perched sideways on his head elbowed his way through the crowd.

He stepped over the rope into the partly cleared space and flashed a green card in my face.

"I'm from the *Morning Paragraph*," he said, briskly. "You running this off?"

He pulled a pencil and paper from his pocket and twisted his head around toward another man who was setting up a camera tripod.

"How about it, Joe?"

"Light's punk," answered Joe. "Better get the crowd together while it lasts. Get the crew grouped right here in front."

The young fellow with the pencil pointed it at me.

"When did you leave Belgium?"

I told him I had never been nearer to Belgium than Staten Island and he went off, nosing in and out of the crowd like a dog trying to pick up a cold trail. By and by he was back in front of me again with his back turned. He was looking up at the silent metal bulk. Joe stood alongside rolling a cigarette.

"Doesn't look like any aeroplane I ever saw," he commented disgustedly. "Why don't they come on out?"

"Publicity stuff," the reporter said. "Well, I'm going to get some action."

At this day and time it seems funny for anyone to have complained that way about the Whirling Machine when you consider it was about the biggest piece of news that ever happened along. But it looked peaceful enough just then.

My wife tugged at my arm.

"Let's go," she suggested, nervously. "I've got to put Johnny to bed. Somehow I have an idea, anyway, that thing is going to explode or something. Frank—there seems to me to be a million eyes looking out of it."

I laughed at her of course. But I had the same idea too. I felt I was being gazed at by sharp eyes. And I am not temperamental or poetic or imaginative or anything like that. It just shows that there is such a thing as instinct even if you do spend your time with plumbers' supplies and fresh salesmen.

But just then something happened.

The crowd, with the help of Hank's lieutenants, had been pushed back to the ropes with much argument, so we left a cleared space of a good twenty feet all around the Whirling Machine. I had my back turned at the time but I heard a sharp report like a tire blowing out and I turned around in time to see something like a wet foot-ball fall from the side of the Machine about thirty feet up. The crowd jumped back on each other's toes. I know they did because an elderly party in a grey golf-suit standing in front of me did a standing, broad-jump backwards and landed on my foot with all his weight. It was no less than two hundred pounds and he moved fast.

I was near the front of the crowd, so, by looking over the broad-jumping golfer's shoulder I could see the thing that had fallen out of the Machine. I got a pretty good look at it.

Since then I have read about twenty different descriptions of that animal. No two agree. But during the last couple of years I have been in front of scientific societies starting with the local Society for Scientific Research, here at home, and including the big Astronomical Convention at Washington, last year, and my description has never varied in spite of all their cross-examining. Sir Garrett Ballantree, one of the council and at one time an internationally famous astronomer, went so far as to say that my testimony showed plainly that if I had continued my profession of plumbing supply selling I would have been unusually successful and that I had the brains

of an average business-man in every particular. I have always been precise about those things and believe in sticking to a straight story. Sir Garrett can size a man up quickly.

I maintain it was like a wet football with feet.

The animal, whatever it was, fell with a plop to the ground and lay there quivering for a moment. It was a greyish-bluish color and about a foot long, round and tapering a little toward the end where its head should have been but wasn't. Instead of a head there were feelers like seaweed and along its back appeared a ridge like the fin of a fish. Its short feet ended in long claws.

It was altogether an ugly-looking affair and I know if I had been drinking I would have known right away I did not see it at all.

Its glistening sides moved in regular jerks like a fish out of water. In fact, if it were not for the tiny legs, I would have thought it a fish of some kind. Then it started scurrying around among the feet of the crowd and the women started to scream.

It slithered over my toes and bumped against the elderly golfer's buck-skin shoes.

"Damnation!" he grunted, and made a kick at it.

Then Hank reached it with a tremendous blow of his club and it lay quivering. Hank's club squished into it again and again. He seemed sore about it. He shook his cudgel at the Whirling Machine.

"Consarn you!" he shouted. "Scaring decent folks with your danged furrin jokes."

A sort of a black slime oozed out of the creature, which had been battered out of shape—if it ever had any. The golfer crowded closer and the *Morning Paragraph* man scribbled and chuckled over his wad of copy-paper.

That is another thing all those learned fellows seemed peeved about. They expected evidently that we would have preserved that *Canus Veni*, as they afterwards christened the animal without seeing it, in alcohol for their inspection. In view of what happened right afterward we were mighty lucky to get away with our lives,

any of us in the field that evening, let alone capturing specimens. To think that we all stood around that silent globe of metal chattering and munching peanuts, in total ignorance of what it held, makes me shiver when I think of it.

Of course Professor Pickering explains that the thing was thrown out as a sort of test by the inmates of the Machine to make sure creatures from their section of the universe could live in the atmosphere around Thermopylae. So he says in his book "Days of Dread."

The reporter shoved the paper in his pocket and looked around.

"Anybody got a ladder here?" he said, rubbing his hands together. "Getting some action now. Publicity maybe. Good stuff though. How about it, Joe?"

Joe grunted and helped push a ladder through the crowd. It was a rickety affair and I wondered what could induce the reporter to thrust himself to it. He propped its twenty feet of patched wood against the side of the Whirling Machine and climbed gingerly up.

"You tell 'em to come on out of that," Hank shouted after him. "And don't go to busting that ladder."

The crowd, as usual, had some jokes ready and offered several suggestions to the man on the ladder with an eye on Hank. But the climber paid no attention to them. He pounded on the metal with a hammer someone had handed him. The golfer was holding the ladder for him having got to the post of honor first.

I have only a confused idea of what happened next. My wife was pulling at my coat-sleeve trying to lead me further away and I had turned my back to the affair of the man on the ladder to answer her. I wanted to stay and see the fun when the ladder broke.

I was facing the grinning crowd when there came a flash of light and a deafening report. I jerked my head around instantly but I have a distinct recollection of the way the faces of the crowd were lit up in the gathering darkness for that second, with their smiles frozen on their faces as they would appear in a flash-light photograph taken unexpectedly.

At first glance nothing had happened. The man on the ladder had not changed his position much. His head was bent back sharply and his body had stiffened. He seemed to be posing in an attitude of violent effort and pretending to be trying to push the Whirling Machine over. Then unexpectedly he relaxed and fell to the ground like a bag of clothes dropped from a window and lay all collapsed in a heap with his straw hat rolling a few feet away. There was a disagreeable smell as if someone was singeing a chicken to get the pin-feathers off.

I caught my wife just in time as she tumbled over and I started half carrying her out of the mob. There was a lot of confusion, the panicky ones in front trying to trample their way toward the road and on the borders the curious ones were trying to get closer to the Machine. I grabbed the arm of a white-faced man who was crowding his way past me.

Together we carried her out of the crush and across the road. She began to revive. The shouts and screams of that pack of frightened men and women streaming by us were enough to rouse anybody.

The next flash and report came just about then and I straightened up to see the elderly golfer, still holding on to the ladder, collapse in a heap.

Things happened fast from then on.

I do not know exactly whether the gas-tanks in the automobiles parked along the road blew up before or after I heard that peculiar sparking, sputtering sound in the air over the Whirling Machine. At any rate the blazing gasoline sprayed over the crowd and here and there men rolled in their burning clothing on the ground with everyone too busy saving his own life to worry about them.

A man who was running toward me—he looked like a country constable of some kind—stopped and grabbed at his hip-pocket. The uproar was so loud that I only realized when he fell to the ground and the unmistakable sound of a whistling bullet went by my ear, that his revolver was exploding in his pocket.

My wife twisted around in my arms and sat up, rubbing her forehead.

"What happened?" she gasped. "Oh, yes. That poor man!"

She looked so scared I was afraid she would faint again so I helped her to her feet and, supporting her, started to put as much distance between ourselves and that infernal thing as possible. The man with me, meanwhile, had disappeared to save his own skin, I suppose. It was hard going; every once in a while a panic-stricken person would careen into us stumbling past. A lot of them were shouting and moaning. They were badly frightened, every mother's son of them.

It was getting dusk by then. We reached the edge of the village and joined a crowd that was milling around in front of the old Seaman mansion and pointing over toward Hank Garvin's meadow.

As we came up to them there was a flash way toward the South and a dull explosion a few seconds later. The old house behind us rattled in every window.

"My God! What's happening anyway?" some woman screamed.

I saw old Captain Marvin standing in front of a group and waving his telescope toward the Whirling Machine. Evidently he had been telling the story of last night's phenomena to any one that would listen.

"Happening?" he shouted out toward the voice. "I'll tell ye what's happening and I seen it coming a long time. It's Bolsheviks, that's what it is. It's a red plot. Did you hear that explosion just now? Could you locate where it come from?"

No one answered. From the direction of the meadow came a sound of screaming as if someone had suddenly seen a ghost. It was an insane cry and I shivered.

"Well," Captain Marlin continued, looking around triumphantly, "I know what blowed up just then. It was the ammunition stores at Sandy Hook. And listen to that—and that!"

He pointed his telescope toward two other points on the darkening horizon. I missed the flashes, waiting to hear the screaming again from the meadow, but after a long, breathless wait the little group caught the muffled sounds of explosions again.

"Fort Washington and the arsenal at White Stone," he snapped. "I know the directions they lay in, you can bet. They're gone—in smithereens."

The crowd murmured in horror.

"Now, look here, Cap, how do you know—" I began to say something reassuring to the crowd when I felt someone twitch my sleeve and turned around to find Rossey behind me. He was dusty from head to foot and puffed for breath but his eyes had a feverish look like a man wakened out of a night-mare.

"Here's the man at last," I said, gladly. "What's all this deviltry about, Rossey?"

He jerked his head at me.

"Come on, Hardiman. Let's get away from here fast. There isn't a moment to lose."

I looked at my wife uncertainly.

"I can walk," she spoke up. "Only hurry. Mr. Rossey is right."

He led the way toward the deserted main street of the town talking over his shoulder.

"Drove most of the way from Hastings. Car blew up down the road. Most novel experience"—Rossey talks like a ten-word message when he gets excited. "Read all about the affair in the morning paper even if they didn't know what they were talking about. I did."

As we passed the front of the local movie theatre I saw that the doors were wide open but the place empty. Across the street from it a man in shirt-sleeves was dragging a trunk down the front steps of a two-family house. Two women were helping him and several children were adding to the racket with dismal wails.

"Hurry up," the man was shouting. "I'll get the flivver."

As he turned to run toward the tiny garage in the rear I saw that it was Chalmers, the cashier of the Thermopylae National Bank.

"What's up?" I shouted.

He looked around quickly and blinked at me.

"Oh, that you, Hardiman? Good Lord, man, haven't you heard about the anarchists? They're burning the town—"

The rest was lost as he disappeared

around the corner of the house. Thick clouds of black smoke rose over the tiled roof.

"He'll never use that car," Rossey said. "His garage is blazing now. Shake it up, Hardiman. We've got to get out of this. If I remember your house is right around the corner. Let's go there and get your boy away. After that we'll put some territory between us and this place."

At the mention of the boy my wife gave a little shriek and ran in front of us. We struggled after her through a thick blanket of oily smoke that swept over us in gusts. It came from an adjoining street where, I judged, Peterson's garage and repair-shop was burning.

"Listen," Rossey cried. "There's hell to pay around here now but there's worse coming. Hurry around to the house and pack a few things—food, blankets, matches and so forth. Like a camping outfit."

He trotted off down the street and I stood wondering if he or I or everyone had gone suddenly crazy. But from the top of the hill I caught a glimpse of a reddish light from the direction of New York and began to realize the extent of the affair.

I turned into Woodrow Wilson Boulevard.

My house seemed to be untouched. Everything looked just as I left it after dinner and for a second I had a crazy impulse to take up the open book on the easy-chair on the porch and forget what was going on around me. It is an ostrich instinct in us all.

Panic is a funny thing. I had not lost much time coming from the Whirling Machine. I doubt if I lost half an hour on the road. But in that short time every house along the street had been hurriedly emptied of its inhabitants. Doors stood open and curtains bellied out through the open windows. Two autos, packed with burned household goods, smouldered in the middle of the Boulevard. All around were strewn boxes and wearing apparel dropped by the stampeding Thermopylaeans.

My wife met me at the door. She was as pale as a sheet.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Rustler

By **GEORGE M. JOHNSON**

Author of "Stan Willis, Cowboy," "Fenced Water," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

OUTLAWS.

FOR a few moments Margaret Arnold lay in that delicious, half unconscious languor which follows a sound sleep, ears idly in tune to the ceaseless click of the car wheels beneath her. Then, resting on one elbow, she raised the window shade and glanced out.

A faint glow in the east marked the beginning of a new day, but the light was not yet sufficient for her to get more than a vague idea of the country traversed. It was rugged, she knew, from the indistinct masses of tumbled rock which whirled by in the enveloping dimness, like so many huge, grotesque animals.

A thrill of pleasurable anticipation passed through the girl's body. She had reached the West—land of mystery and romance, of dashing cowboys and cattle kings, of gray

desert and painted Indians, of rattlesnakes and skulking coyotes.

For years Margaret had been looking forward to this visit with her cousin, Burt Arnold, whom she had not seen since they were children in staid New England.

She had dreamed about the trip; had tried to imagine what her cousin's place, the Circle Cross Ranch, must be like.

A light tap sounded at the door of her drawing-room, and Margaret started nervously. Her thoughts had been far away, beyond the distant mountains whose foothills the train was skirting.

"Yes?" she inquired.

"It's four thirty, miss," came the voice of the Pullman porter. "We're due at Wolf Springs in half an hour."

"All right," the girl responded. "Thank you."

Quickly she rose and, snapping on the electric light, began dressing. Fifteen min-

utes later came a sudden jarring lurch, with the harsh grind of airbrakes. Margaret was violently thrown half across the tiny compartment, barely saved from a bad fall. Her first thought was one of panic—that the train was already approaching Wolf Springs—but she immediately realized that so unceremonious a stop could hardly be on the schedule.

As the cars ceased moving she heard the hiss of escaping steam from the engine up ahead; heard excited shouts and hoarse cries, interrupted by a few scattered explosions as of pistol shots.

Her fellow passengers, thus rudely roused from slumber, were audibly grumbling and calling for the porter. Somewhere in the front of the car a woman screamed. Something had happened; what it was no one knew, but all wanted to know.

"I say, George," a man's querulous voice demanded, "what's all the stir about? We wrecked, or what?"

"Ah don't know, boss—not for suah. But Ah judges we-all's being held up. D-didn't you-all heah shooting up ahaid?"

"Held up!" the querulous voice went on petulantly. "That's damned nonsense. Probably a hot box. Stick your head out the vestibule door and get a line on things."

"Who? Me? You-all's joking, suh. Ah ain't sticking ma bean out no vestibool doah. Ah done it once when de train stop sudden this yere way. A gemman with a big hat on his haid and a big gun in his fist sees me.

"Wh-wha you-all want?" Ah asks polite.

"Dat man, he jes' look at me, cold like. He don't say nothing; but he flips up de gun.

"Whango! she says. Wheeee-zipt! says de bullet; and Ah ducks. Yessuh! Now Ah ain't taking no moah chances. Not me. No, sah!"

A babble of frightened chatter ran the length of the car as its occupants grasped the porter's disquieting news.

"Here, John, take my rings and wrist watch," a woman ordered in a stage whisper. "Hide them in one of your socks with your money. The robbers will be coming

through the car any minute. Why did you insist on bringing me into this terrible country?"

"You-all don't need to worry none," the porter's soothing voice informed his demoralized charges. "Them fellows ain't gyvine through de train. All dey's intrusted in is what's in de 'spress caah."

At the first sound of tumult Margaret had snapped off the light. Trembling with excitement, though not especially frightened, she now dropped to her knees beside the window and peered cautiously out. A man was standing there, obviously on guard, for she perceived a heavy pistol in his hand. His head was level with the startled girl's eyes; Margaret could almost have touched him.

As though realizing that his duties were not of vital importance, the outlaw shoved the weapon back into its holster, and coolly rolled himself a cigarette. He struck a match, cupping it in his hands, and for one single fleeting instant his face stood out plainly in the glare. Margaret gasped, for he seemed to be looking directly into her eyes.

Involuntarily she dropped down below the window ledge to avoid that embarrassing scrutiny, but a second or two convinced her that these fears must be groundless. The drawing-room was inky black, and to look within it from outside would have been impossible. The outlaw's face had merely chanced to be turned in her direction at the instant he lighted his cigarette.

Again Margaret peeped up over the window sill, curiosity overcoming fear. The bandit had vanished. Eagerly the girl strained her eyes through the somber gray shadows of early dawn; nothing was to be seen.

Yet, her mind still retained a vivid impression of the stranger's face, graven on her memory with startling clearness. It was a strong face, lean, and tanned by exposure to sun and wind; the jaws firm, though lacking any semblance of harshness or criminal stamp.

Margaret found it hard to believe that a face of this type belonged to a train robber. She caught herself wondering who the

man was; how he had become identified with this desperate and illegal profession. A dull explosion sounded from up ahead, and she realized that the bandits had blown open the safe in the express car.

"This is certainly a fitting introduction to the wild and woolly West," Margaret mused. "Won't I have something to write back home! I wouldn't have missed it for worlds. If the robbers have only been thoughtful enough not to kill anybody!"

After some delay, word was passed along through the cars that the robbers had left, taking with them a big haul, including money and valuables from the safe as well as registered mail. No one had been killed, though the express messenger, who had been plucky enough to open fire on the outlaws, had been wounded. A doctor, luckily traveling in one of the Pullmans, was attending him.

The bandits had piled a mass of broken rock fragments on the tracks in order to bring the engine to a stop at the place selected for their foray. As soon as this could be cleared away the train would proceed.

Speculation and conjecture were rife among the various passengers—many of whom, now that the danger was past, seemed rather to welcome the excitement of their unusual experience. Margaret Arnold, still under the spell of her adventure, went on about her preparations. At last the train moved slowly forward.

"I wish I knew something of that man," the girl murmured. "I wonder if I'll ever see him again. Wouldn't it be strange if I did! I'd be sure to know him. There was something appealing about his face. No train robber ought to look like that."

The faint glow in the eastern sky was gradually changing to rosy pink as the train slipped on through semidesert country. Margaret drank in the beauties of the approaching sunrise, watching while the toneless gray of the landscape that stretched limitlessly beyond her gaze was replaced by a dusky twilight which persisted even after the distant mountain peaks gleamed white in the first slanting rays of the sun.

The whole scene was gloriously beautiful, more so than she had ever imagined it could be, yet involuntarily she shivered. Some-

where the splendor of the rising sun would fall upon a group of desperate men, enemies of all that law and civilization stood for—men whose reckless deeds struck at the heart of society. Their presence smirched the clean-cut majesty of rolling plain and towering mountains like an evil taint. Yet one of those vicious characters she had seen, had gazed into his face. Margaret loathed crime and violence, together with those who perpetrated it, but instinctively she ranked one of the robber gang apart from his fellows, condemning them, but excusing him.

A shrill whistle from the engine brought the girl out of her reverie. The porter again tapped at the door.

"Your bags ready, miss? We'll be stopping at Wolf Springs in about two minutes."

"They're all ready," the traveler replied. "You may come in and get them, please."

The engineer whistled again, and Margaret felt the train slacken speed under the gentle drag of the airbrakes, very different from the sudden, jarring stop back in the desert country. She followed the porter, conscious of the curious gaze of her fellow passengers, who were doubtless marveling that she should be leaving them here. An instant later she was on the station platform, a tall, bronze-faced young man coming toward her smiling, his hand outstretched.

Margaret recognized him as her cousin.

"Well, well!" he cried heartily. "It seems good to see you, Margaret. Have a pleasant trip?"

"Very pleasant, thanks," she replied. "Thrilling, too. Just imagine, Burt—our train was held up this morning, only a little while ago. The robbers wounded the express messenger and made off with a treasure which rumor placed at anywhere from fifty thousand dollars to half a million."

"I wondered why the conductor was in such a hurry to reach the telegraph office. Thought something must be doing. We didn't treat you very well, I'm afraid. Your first impressions of our country won't be highly flattering. But train holdups aren't so uncommon; there have been several the

last few years in this section, though none quite so close home as this."

"Have the robbers ever been caught?" the girl asked. "Any of them?"

He shook his head. "Not so far, I'm sorry to say. There is so much wild, unsettled country that the outlaws have every chance to escape after one of their jobs. Some day they'll try the stunt once too often. Up to the present, however, the railroad detectives have been baffled. That is the correct word, isn't it?" and he grinned at her. "They're wonders at digging up clues, these railroad detectives, but the clues invariably peter out. Local authorities don't seem inclined to get excited over the matter, perhaps not wishing to discourage home industry. But enough of that. You have a trunk or two, haven't you?"

"Only one," she smiled. "And, following your suggestion, I brought mostly rough clothing, suitable for outdoor wear."

"That's the stuff. We don't dress up for dinner out here. I see they've thrown off a trunk, which likely is yours. Let me have the check, and I'll get it out of hock. Then we'll rustle some breakfast."

"Really I'm too excited and thrilled to eat, Burt," Margaret protested. "I'm just like a little child, losing my appetite whenever anything unusual develops. I would like a cup of coffee, however."

"Humph!" Burt grunted. "We'll see about that."

He strode down the platform to look after her trunk.

Margaret took advantage of his departure to glance curiously about her. The railroad station was like a dozen of others she had passed on the westward journey—a small, weather-beaten structure—though the warehouse for freight was a bit more imposing. Up the track a windmill reared itself above a large, squat-shaped wooden tank, from which the engine was taking water.

In the other direction extended a long line of shipping pens for cattle, now empty. Three or four men dressed in cowboy regalia stood on the station platform. They studiously avoided looking at her, but Margaret suspected that precious little escaped their notice.

The town of Wolf Springs—what there

was of it—lay back of the station, not very prepossessing in appearance, decidedly drab and uninteresting. The buildings, scattered about in desultory fashion, were gray with dust; fresh paint was conspicuously absent.

Further observations were interrupted by her cousin's return. Burt picked up Margaret's two traveling bags.

"I've got a buckboard other side of the station," he said. "First thing on the program is to get the luggage aboard."

"What's a buckboard?" Margaret asked. "Second cousin to a flivver?"

"Wrong guess," he laughed. "Automobiles haven't struck this country yet; roads are something we're short on. But you can drive a buckboard 'most anywhere—if you have to, and the harness holds together. There she is." And Margaret formally made the acquaintance of that typical Western equipage behind a pair of small though sturdy ponies.

The station agent wheeled her trunk around the platform, whereupon Burt lashed the items of baggage firmly in place.

"The sea is rough in places between here and the Circle Cross," he grinned, "and the old boat may roll some. Now hop in and we'll chase up a square meal. It's thirty miles to the ranch, and you're to eat hearty before we start," sternly. "Understand?"

"Yes, mister," the girl replied meekly. "I'll do my best."

Margaret had an opportunity for a closer survey of Wolf Springs as the ponies trotted along a sandy street; it was bordered by buildings of which a good proportion seemed to be saloons.

"Town's dead now," Burt remarked conversationally. "Nights it livens up, but for real excitement you should be here during the cattle shipping. The cow-punchers can be counted on to keep things moving."

"Are they really so terribly wild?"

"Not at all. I didn't mean to give that impression. Cowboys as a class are mighty decent, just as much so as red-blooded outdoor men anywhere. They work hard, with few chances for relaxation, and it's only natural that when an outfit hits town the riders should whoop things up a little.

They'll drink, though not usually to excess, and they love to gamble; shootings are far less common than among the gun toters in a city like New York or Chicago. Genuine bad men—the chaps with reputations as killers or gun slingers—are scarce."

He pulled the team up before a building labeled the O. K. Restaurant.

"This isn't exactly Delmonico's," Burt grinned as he helped Margaret to the ground. "You won't find grapefruit on the bill of fare; but the lad who runs it knows how to make first-class coffee, and in general I can recommend his chow. It's plain, substantial, and well cooked."

With a steaming platter of ham and fried eggs on the table before them, Margaret found her appetite miraculously returning. Actually the crisp dry air had made her ravenously hungry. Burt's prediction regarding the coffee and other food proved wholly deserved.

"Really I didn't know how nearly starved I was," she confessed.

"I'm glad to see you can eat," her cousin remarked. "It makes me sore to see anybody—man, woman, or child—fiddle with his meals."

Forty-five minutes later they were again driving through the settlement, headed toward a cluster of mountain peaks, hazy in the distance. A cow-puncher lounged indolently at the doorway of a saloon, and Margaret stared in unconscious rudeness, believing she recognized in him the man whom she had already seen that morning; the man whose features had been lighted by the sudden flare of a match, when he lit his cigarette, back at the scene of the train robbery.

He and Burt exchanged curt nods as the buckboard passed, but neither spoke. The stranger touched his broad brimmed hat in deference to Burt's companion.

"Who was that?" Margaret whispered tensely.

Something in her voice caused Burt to turn his head, regarding her in curiosity.

"Name's Rad Newell. What's the matter? You act as if you'd seen a ghost."

Margaret laughed to cover her momentary embarrassment.

"I thought I had, for a second," she replied. "He looked like a man I once saw before. But of course I'm mistaken; the two couldn't be the same."

"I guess not. It isn't likely you ever saw Rad Newell." Burt spoke the name with a peculiar coldness that told Margaret much—yet too little.

"You don't seem to like him. Who is this Mr. Newell?"

"He's a damned rustler! Excuse me, Margaret. I didn't mean that adjective to slip out, and perhaps I ought not to call Newell a rustler when I can't back up my words with proof. I wouldn't say it publicly, unless I was ready for him to come gunning me—as he likely would. Facts are, some of us feel certain that he knows where certain missing cattle have disappeared to. We can't do anything—yet—not until we've got the goods on him. Meanwhile we're lying low, giving him all the rope he'll take. When we get the fellow where we want him, we'll snap up tight on the rope."

There was a savage ferocity in Burt's voice; this was not the boy whom Margaret had known and played with years ago. Suddenly she felt as if Burt was a total stranger, for all their childhood associations.

"When did you ever see anybody that reminded you of Newell?" was his next question.

Somehow, Margaret did not feel like telling her cousin of the mysterious face she had glimpsed through the Pullman window. Sober reflection convinced her that it was practically impossible for Rad Newell and the train robber to be the same; and to mention the resemblance between them might cause the former undeserved trouble when it seemed that he was likely to have trouble enough.

His appearance was attractive, and she resented her cousin's savage animosity. So she turned the query aside.

Yet as the horses trotted onward her brain was busy. Margaret had always flattered herself on remembering faces, and the more she thought the more certain she became that these two men must be identical.

But the train holdup had taken place

twenty-five miles at least from Wolf Springs. One of the gang would hardly be expected to leave his comrades and appear in town; and even so, how could he cover the distance quickly enough to be there within an hour of the train's arrival?

"They *can't* be the same," Margaret told herself. "It's beyond reason. They might be doubles, or maybe twin brothers." That explanation was not wholly satisfactory; but lacking a better, she was forced to accept it.

Meanwhile, Burt Arnold was exerting himself to make the journey less tedious for his passenger. He pointed out things of interest along the way; told her innumerable facts about cowboys and cowboy life; gave her a general idea of how the cattle business was conducted on all the big ranches in the West.

"I know from your letters that you like horseback riding," he said. "That's a good thing, because saddle horses provide our main means of travel. A buckboard is much too slow, and only used by us when we have to."

"I don't want any bucking bronchos," she laughed.

"We won't make you try them," he assured her. "Western horses are gentle enough if they're properly broken. I've one little beauty I've been saving just for you."

Margaret rewarded him with a smile of appreciation.

"That's fine, Burt. I've been looking forward to the riding as much as any other part of my visit."

The horses toiled over the crest of a divide, and Burt's arm pointed out a distant collection of ranch buildings.

"Is that your place?" Margaret asked in quick interest.

"Not yet," he rejoined. "The Circle Cross is nearly ten miles farther on. That ranch belongs to a friend of mine named Sam Mattson. He knows you're coming and seems quite anxious to meet you. Likely he'll be jogging over our way some time to-morrow or next day."

"How old is Mr. Mattson?" Margaret demanded mischievously. "And is he good looking?"

Burt Arnold laughed immoderately.

"Just like all the rest of the girls, aren't you, Margaret? Interested in members of the pants brigade. Not to keep you in suspense, I'll say that Sam is a few years older than I am and that he's not bad looking, as men go. But he's a hardened bach. You'll have to go some to bring him to terms.

"Still"—Burt turned to bestow a glance of frank approval on his cousin—"I don't mind saying that you ought to be able to turn the trick. I never thought that freckle-faced, long-legged, skinny little kid cousin of mine would grow up into such a peach of a girl. You're a credit to the family, Margaret."

"Thank you so much, old dear," Margaret rejoined primly, a tiny trace of color on her cheeks at Burt's bluntly spoken praise. "But whence the quaint notion that I might try to capture the case-hardened heart of your bachelor friend? Do you imagine I came West husband hunting—and with only one trunk."

"Best hunting grounds in the world for that kind of big game," Burt chuckled. "We grow 'em big in heart, sound in body, guaranteed not to flinch, shy, or kick over the traces, and gentled so you can drive 'em with a piece of sewing silk. Money back if goods delivered prove unsatisfactory on trial."

"Goodness, Burt," the girl laughed. "You sound exactly like a mail order catalogue. You ought to quote prices and offer to send samples."

"There's a reason. Mail order catalogues constitute the bulk of our literature. I've seen a gun toting cow-puncher get real excited over one, especially that portion devoted to women's clothing."

"They must be terribly hard up for excitement then," Margaret murmured. "Poor dears!"

The miles slipped away, and when at length Margaret was beginning to realize that she was tired, they swung around the edge of a broad flat-topped butte, to find themselves facing a second collection of ranch buildings, that so far as appearances went seemed no different from those constituting Mattson's place.

"Welcome to the Circle Cross, fair lady," Burt Arnold announced gayly. "Here we are!"

CHAPTER II.

POKER EYES.

MARGARET found the Circle Cross fully living up to her expectations, all that a cattle ranch should be. Her cousin employed half a dozen or more riders, typical cow-punchers with their chaps, spurs, and big blue pistols. However they seemed afflicted with unnecessary embarrassment while in the presence of the boss's pretty cousin from the East.

"They're as bashful as a flock of lambs," Margaret complained indignantly to Burt, after one or two fruitless efforts to cultivate various members of the outfit. "I never dreamed that Western conversation should be limited to 'Yes, ma'am,' or 'No, ma'am,' Don't they ever talk like he-men?"

"Now you just stop trying to vamp my boys," Burt commanded in mock severity. "I won't stand for your taking advantage of their unsophisticated innocence."

"I never did have any luck at the vamping game," she sighed. "But I'd love to hear some real cowboy talk. Why, they seem almost afraid of me."

"Perhaps they are. You see, Margaret, you're a new type to them. They don't quite know how to take you, but if you continue to show yourself friendly, without any suggestion of a patronizing attitude, the punchers will meet you halfway."

"They're a splendid lot of fellows, loyal hearted and true as steel. You may think them reserved and lacking in social graces, but don't be deceived regarding their actual worth. If you were in any sort of trouble, not one would hesitate to risk his life or even lose it, with no thought other than being of service to you."

"That's a fine tribute, Burt."

"And the beauty of it is that the tribute is deserved," Burt told her.

Sam Mattson rode over to the Circle Cross the day after Margaret's arrival there, proving to be a bluff and breezy personality quite in contrast with Burt's diffident riders.

"I'm sure pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Arnold," he cried, almost crushing Margaret's hand in his. "For two-three months now Burt's done nothing but talk about you and the visit he was expecting. I told him he ought to doll the old place up, and so he sent to Sears Roebuck for some white window curtains. I helped him fix 'em. Class, what?"

"Sure," Burt agreed easily, while Margaret's dancing eyes flashed from one to the other. "We wanted you to feel at home. And you'd laughed to see how the boys pitched in. They scrubbed the place inside and out. Shorty Williams—he's the bow-legged puncher—certainly did sling a mean mop. Once he hooked Red Collins by the spurs, tripping him so that Red flopped over the pail of soap-suds, sprawling on the floor while his clothes soaked up water."

"Swim, you yellow bellied frog!" Shorty yelled.

"Swim yourself!" Red told him, and as soon as he could get the soap out of his eyes he tore into Shorty like a dripping octopus.

"They wrestled around considerable, and when they got through the place looked like a wrecked ship. We had to do it all over again."

Margaret laughed till the tears came.

"Why couldn't I have seen that?" she exclaimed. "But I could love the boys for wanting to do all that scrubbing and cleaning in honor of my visit."

"Shorty wanted us to take a wagon and bring half a dozen trees from the hills and set out in front of the ranch," Burt went on. "He figured we could keep 'em alive while you were here if the boys watered 'em every night."

"And after showing all that consideration and thoughtfulness, Shorty won't open his mouth to me now," Margaret mourned. "Am I so terrible, Mr. Mattson?" she appealed to Sam.

Mattson glanced her over with a judicial, appraising air.

"Miss Arnold," said he, "I'm going to be frank. I got the shock of my life when I first laid eyes on you."

"What do you mean?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I think I ought to tell you what Burt said," Mattson grinned. "That will explain the shock."

"If you do, Sam," Burt grunted dangerously, "I'll just about murder you."

"No he won't," Margaret cried. "I won't let him. But you must tell me what he said. I'm dying to know."

"He said," Mattson chuckled, winking at Burt, "that you would be a regular girl, willing to take our life as you found it, roughness and all, but that as far as looks went he didn't anticipate you'd qualify; not from what he recalled of you as a kid. And he said he knew that if you had grown up easy to look at you'd sure have sent him a picture to prove it."

Margaret made a face at her cousin, whose embarrassment was painfully obvious. She really felt sorry for him, considering that Sam Mattson had shown rather poor taste in repeating Burt's chance remark.

"Never mind, Burt," Margaret said. "I'm sorry I didn't send the picture, and as soon as I get back home I'll have some new ones taken. You'll receive the photographer's best, even though he does flatter me shamelessly."

"No picture could do that, Miss Arnold," Mattson cried. "And how about me? Don't I come in on the proposition?"

Margaret pretended to consider this.

"Perhaps," she replied. "I'll have to wait and see whether you deserve one."

"That being the case, you might as well book me now," Sam said confidently. "You'll find me one of the best little deservers there is."

Secretly Margaret wasn't so sure. She found herself reserving judgment on Sam Mattson. He was good looking, as Burt had said, but in some degree he appeared just a bit too free and easy; it almost seemed to the girl that he presumed over much on such a slight acquaintance.

It was not exactly what Sam had said that gave her this unpleasant impression as the way he said it; or perhaps the two together. At the same time Margaret was generous enough to concede that she might be misjudging the rancher by comparing him with men of her social world back home.

Mattson's eyes bothered her. They seemed to have no particular color, and in addition, were absolutely expressionless. Even when he laughed—as he did often, for Mattson possessed a boundless good nature—his eyes displayed no mirth.

Yet they had an almost uncanny fascination for Margaret, and she constantly studied them, seeking to penetrate the veil which hung before them—but in vain.

That afternoon the three rode out together. Naturally both Burt and Sam were past masters in the art of horsemanship, and Margaret, comparing their riding with that of men in the elm shaded college town back in New England, was forced to admit Western superiority. She rode well herself, finding the big cowboy saddle far more comfortable than the little padded leather to which she was accustomed.

All through the ride Margaret was still, perhaps half unconsciously, analyzing Sam Mattson, or rather attempting to analyze him. Yet he remained an enigma to her; affable, open-minded, quaintly humorous in his Western phraseology, she none the less could not free her mind of the suspicion that he held something back, that he remained constantly on guard.

Only one significant incident marked the progress of their outing, significant, that is, to Mattson. His horse shied violently at the sharp whirl of a rattlesnake underfoot, and the rider curbed it by an unnecessarily savage backward pull on the bridle reins.

Margaret understood a little of the construction of Western bits, but she could use her common sense. She saw the tortured animal wince, saw the flash of dumb agony in its rolling eyes, and a moment later perceived the drops of blood dripping from its mouth.

She noticed that the bridle of Burt's horse was equipped with a somewhat similar bit, but she also noted that her cousin always permitted the reins to sag loosely, putting no pressure on the cruel appliance.

Some miles from the Circle Cross they swept up over a table land, from which the country fell below them in a long, gradual descent. In the distance appeared the buildings of a ranch; beyond it stretched the broken bad land country.

"What place is that?" Margaret asked curiously.

Her two companions exchanged quick glances, with a hidden meaning that Margaret did not wholly miss.

"Belongs to Rad Newall," Burt said shortly. And Margaret, perceiving that the subject was distasteful to him, forbore further questioning along that line.

A few minutes later the distant ranch house slipped from view.

They returned to the Circle Cross in time for supper, after which Mattson took his departure.

"Drop around any time, Sam," Burt told him. "There'll be occasions when I'm busy, and I know Margaret will be glad to ride out with you."

"Indeed yes," the girl echoed, feeling that she must appear cordial toward her cousin's friend. Actually she would have much preferred to have him stay away.

"How do you like him?" Burt inquired after their visitor had ridden away under the soft glow of the low-hanging stars.

Margaret hesitated.

"I like him—in some ways," she rejoined, speaking slowly, "but I don't know, Burt—I'm afraid I was disappointed in your friend."

"Disappointed? What do you mean?"

"It's not easy to put into words. Generally I can form a pretty clear estimate of a man after associating with him for only a few hours, but Mr. Mattson is difficult to place. He seems to me not your kind at all, Burt."

"I don't get you. Do you mean that he is wholly of the West, while I am a sort of hybrid—part Eastern, part Western?"

"No, I don't mean that. You have been here so long that you're as much Western as he is. It's something different; deeper than mere superficial characteristics. Any one can look into your eyes and read you for what you are—honorable, true, straight in all your dealings with others; but—did you ever try to read Sam Mattson's eyes, Burt?"

"He's got poker eyes," Burt chuckled. "That's nothing. Often I've wished I had. It would have saved me money more than once."

Margaret smiled at her cousin's way of expressing it.

"Poker eyes may be all right when you play poker," she remarked, "but one doesn't need to play poker all the time, not with his friends at least. Another thing. I can't imagine you as being cruel to animals—needlessly cruel, that is. Of course I can understand that a certain amount of cruelty must go with your business, where wild steers and unbroken horses are concerned. But why carry the thing further than necessity requires?"

"You mean about the horse this afternoon," Burt said. "I was hoping you didn't see that, Margaret."

"You agree with me then, don't you? It's against Sam that he abused his horse."

"Yes," Burt conceded reluctantly. "Sam must have forgotten himself for a second. I'm sorry, because it may give you a wrong impression. He isn't a bad fellow at all."

"I don't say he is," quickly; "but in forming my opinion I naturally take everything I see into consideration."

"You mustn't make a mistake in sizing Sam Mattson up," Burt continued earnestly. "Men of the West are like the country they live in; their virtues and vices both bear the stamp of its influence. For all its sun-bathed beauty this country may be cruel as hell; hard, inexorable, pitiless to the incompetent and weakling. I know no place where the law of the survival of the fittest is more remorselessly enforced."

"Sam Mattson is only typical; big-hearted with the vastness of the open range, and, it may be, not entirely lacking some of the cruelty which raw nature possesses in such abundant degree."

Margaret ventured no further comments regarding Sam Mattson. She remembered that as a boy Burt Arnold had always been passionately loyal to his friends, blind to their faults, and quick to resentment when others criticized.

She perceived that Burt was unchanged in this particular, and had no wish to hurt him. Yet it seemed to her that a man who could be cruel to his horse without due cause could not fail to display that cruelty toward his fellow men if the occasion should arise.

Already she was the least bit afraid of Sam Mattson.

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND IN TIME OF NEED.

THE possibility of getting lost never once entered Margaret's mind as she rode out from the Circle Cross alone one glorious afternoon. Burt had taken his riders off on a fence building job, apologizing for the necessity of abandoning his guest to her own device for a few hours. She puttered about the ranch, wrote a few letters, and then, following a sudden impulse, saddled the pony and went exploring.

It was in her mind to go but a short distance, although she had by now ridden about in company with Burt or Sam Mattson sufficiently to feel reasonably familiar with the surrounding country. Its first strangeness had in large degree worn off.

Burt had not expressly warned her against riding forth alone, feeling that such warning was unnecessary. Margaret knew intuitively that he would disapprove. She went, just the same.

She derived a pleasurable thrill from thus adventuring, for Margaret Arnold was not that type of girl who is miserable when denied male companionship. In fact she was thoroughly tired of Sam Mattson.

Sam was obviously quite smitten with her charms, while for her part Margaret had no intention of allowing the affair to drift beyond control if she could prevent it. Her doubts regarding Sam had increased as she saw more of him, and she was rather out of patience with Burt for permitting himself to become so intimate with the fellow. Margaret suspected that her friendly, open-minded cousin was not a very good judge of character.

One thing she particularly resented was Sam's cool attitude of proprietorship towards her. He was taking things for granted; once or twice Margaret had been forced to be almost rude.

Some of these thoughts were in her mind as she sent her pony along at a brisk, exhilarating pace. But a host of interesting sights quickly dispelled them as the ex-

plorer's alert eyes darted here and there, eager to miss nothing. A small herd of range cattle turned their heads towards her in sullen suspicion; then retreated at a lumbering gallop, tails in air.

Farther on she traversed a prairie dog settlement, allowing her horse to pick his way slowly because of the ever-present danger of a broken leg. She laughed in delight at the queer antics of the tiny creatures, yelping their shrill, querulous note from the mounds of yellow earth above the burrows, ridiculous stubby tails beating a stiff accompaniment.

A solemn little owl observed her from his perch turning his head to keep the intruder in sight as she passed. A sluggish rattler threw itself into a coil at her approach, whirring a spiteful challenge. Margaret shuddered at the sibilant harshness of the sound, not sorry when the leisurely progress of the pony had carried her beyond earshot.

Clear of the prairie dog town, with its traps for the unwary horse, she pressed her mount to greater speed, making only a general note of the country into which she was riding.

Time slipped by, and tardily Margaret awoke to the fact that the surrounding territory was wholly strange, a section into which their previous rides had never carried her. She was not alarmed, however, merely swinging back in a wide circle that should bring her again into a familiar region.

But something had gone amiss with Margaret's calculations, and an hour of riding disclosed nothing about the landscape that she recalled seeing before. Vague, unpleasant doubts assailed her, and the delicious thrill of exploration began to give way to a feeling closely akin to fear.

The sun was already sinking low in the western sky, but the knowledge thus afforded as to points of the compass proved of no value in the emergency. Actually Margaret was uncertain whether the Circle Cross ranch lay north, east, or south from her present location.

Her wanderings during the afternoon had been wholly aimless, and the realization that darkness was approaching dulled what reasoning powers she might otherwise have

exercised. In her ignorance Margaret had committed the one unpardonable sin from the viewpoint of an explorer; she had traveled heedlessly along, with no regard for landmarks to serve as guides for the return journey.

Desperately she tried to stifle her increasing fears, telling herself over and over again that she was all right; that she would shortly be riding again into the familiar Circle Cross range. But these predictions were not fulfilled, and Margaret's panic grew as her hopes were repeatedly dashed.

"Rex must know the way home," she reasoned, and as a last resort gave the pony free rein.

But Rex somehow failed to grasp the situation, and placidly jogged along, traveling as much at random as ever. Locating the missing Circle Cross ranch seemed nothing in his life.

A peculiarly shaped butte came into view, half a mile or so ahead, and in a sudden stab of relief Margaret thought she recognized it as one seen on the day of that first ride with Sam Mattson and her cousin, as they cut through a section of the bad lands on the way home. If so, she knew how to get back to the Circle Cross.

But as she approached the bizarre mass of yellowish sandstone, new doubts rose in her mind. Was this the hill she thought it to be? She couldn't decide positively, dreading to discover herself mistaken.

The grotesque outlines changed, as if mocking her, and in dull despair Margaret realized that she had been tricked by a chance resemblance.

She rode on past the deceptive butte, dipping into a boulder-strewn dry wash through which Rex picked his way gingerly. Some distance beyond the wash Margaret abruptly came upon three horsemen, close together in conference.

The girl eagerly rode towards them, her one thought that here at last was salvation. These men could tell her where she was; perhaps be induced to guide her home. Silently they regarded her as she approached, and only when she was quite near did Margaret perceive that they were not ordinary American cowboys, but rather

Mexicans, with the flashy gaudy equipment and clothing characteristic of the vaquero.

Simultaneously the three removed their wide brimmed sombreros with an exaggerated politeness, wholly belied by the sullen evil of their faces.

"Now I've done it!" Margaret thought. "Jumped from the frying pan into the fire with a vengeance. These men certainly are a hard looking trio."

With a forced coolness she sized up the situation. A sudden retreat would probably not bring escape and might even hasten violence on the part of the Mexicans. The fact of her being lost was a fatal handicap.

"My only chance is to try and carry things through," she reasoned; "above all not to let these fellows suspect that I'm afraid of them. Perhaps I'm in no danger."

Mustering her courage, Margaret addressed them with a confident smile.

"How do you do?" she said.

"*Buenas dias, señorita!*" one of them responded, his swarthy lips parting in a flash of white teeth.

"Can you tell me how far it is to the Circle Cross ranch?" Margaret went on, carefully avoiding a confession that she didn't know the way.

The three exchanged significant sidelong glances among themselves from under lowered eyelids. They whispered together briefly in mongrel Spanish, pausing to sneak stealthy, furtive looks of inquiry at Margaret as they talked.

She of course did not understand what the men were saying; merely gathered that they were discussing what to do about her. The fact that they conferred in this way before answering her question she took as a bad sign.

"You are lost, *señorita*. Is that not so?" said the man who had replied to her salutation. He seemed to be the leader.

"Yes, I am," Margaret admitted. Denial was vain.

"You rode from the Circle Cross rancho?"

Margaret nodded.

"The owner, Señor Arnold, is my kinsman," she added. "He will reward you generously if you help me to return there."

The Mexican bowed graciously, his face lighted by an evil smirk.

"Gladly will we do that, *señorita*, though the pleasure of your society for a little while will be reward enough. Come! We will take you to the Circle Cross."

Instinctively Margaret knew that he was lying; that the three had no intention of guiding her home. She read that back of the smile on the speaker's evil, leering face, and in the diabolical grins of his comrades. Where they planned to take her was uncertain; what would happen when they reached that unknown place was too dreadful to think of.

In a blind spasm of utter terror Margaret whirled her horse.

The impulse to action came too late. The nearest Mexican anticipated her purpose, and his lean, muscular hand swiftly grasped the bridle rein.

Frantically Margaret lashed at his face with her quirt, but he caught the blows on his other arm, not relinquishing his hold on the rein of her plunging pony. His fellows closed in.

One of them seized her arm, twisting it until she screamed in pain, perforce dropping the quirt, though not before a final wild blow left a crimson welt across his cheek.

"*Por Dios!*" he snarled, adding a stream of vile oaths, face livid with rage. "Is that any way for a *señorita* to act when *caballeros* offer their help? You are mad, *señorita*."

Panting, choking, Margaret stared at them through fear-dilated eyes. Their glances dwelt in gloating admiration on the slim grace of this unexpected captive that fate had thrown their way. A coarse hand rested heavily on her shoulder; Margaret almost fainted, overcome with loathing at the odious touch.

The trio again consulted in their bastard Spanish, apparently coming to agreement. With no further words to Margaret, the leader uncoiled the rope which hung from his saddlehorn, knotting the free end about the neck of her horse. Then the cavalcade started briskly off.

For a mile they traveled thus, covering ground at a smoking gallop, while Marga-

ret's mind desperately sought some plan for escape. Gladly would she have made them shoot her, but saw no way of effecting even that dire expedient. She had about reached the point where hope was dead.

The prospects of rescue were all too slim, since no one at the Circle Cross knew where she was. Searching parties dispatched when Burt at last became alarmed over her continued absence would be guided by chance alone. Margaret had no weapon, not even a knife.

Eagerly she scanned the country through which the three horsemen conducted her; it remained wholly unfamiliar, as before, and the girl was forced to the conclusion that they were getting farther and farther from the Circle Cross—and her only hope of deliverance.

She thought enviously of Burt and his hard-riding cowboys, with their jingling spurs and long-barreled pistols. With what eagerness would they obliterate these vile abductors, avenging the deadly insult to their employer's cousin with shrill yells and cracking six-shooters.

But the cow-punchers and her cousin were miles away, hardly yet aware that she needed their help so desperately. Sick at heart, eyes dull with fear of horrors ahead which she could imagine but vaguely, Margaret stared frantically about her, while the thudding hoofbeats carried them ruthlessly on, deeper into the rugged, unlovely region of the bad lands.

Around the edge of a sandstone hogback appeared a solitary rider, motionless on his horse. Margaret perceived him, and new hope leaped up in her heart, realizing that he was watching the progress of her captors. Suddenly he was galvanized into action, riding furiously in a course that would cut at a sharp angle that followed by the abductors.

Margaret had seen the silent stranger before her captors did, but even at that distance there was something strangely familiar about him; and she recalled the cowboy lounging at the entrance to the saloon as she and Burt departed from Wolf Springs the morning of her arrival there.

The Mexicans did not long remain in ignorance of his coming, and in spite of three-

to-one odds in their favor were manifestly frightened at his swift approach. Margaret caught the name "Newell" passed among them. So it was he after all, just as she had expected.

Margaret's three captors abruptly separated in as many directions, choosing to escape if they could, rather than fight. A fierce exultation thrilled the helpless girl as she saw Newell swing in on her trail, ignoring the other two.

Danger was not yet past, but this man, cattle rustler though he might be, was of her own race; come to save her like a knight errant of old—a redoubtable champion, as shown by the craven Mexicans' unwillingness to face him.

Her swarthy captor, scowling, drew in close, his hand again grasping the bridle rein as they dashed madly along. Margaret knew the reason for this; so that the pursuer would not dare fire, lest his bullets strike her by mistake. Yet she felt no fear; only a superb confidence that this unknown champion must triumph at the end.

She heard the heavy beat of flying hoofs behind, glanced back, surprised to see how near he was already, thundering along on a magnificent black horse. As she looked up she saw his right arm, holding a blue Colt, flash up; saw a burst of white smoke even before the crack of the forty-five reached her ears. Next the sickening crunch of a bullet boring into human flesh.

The Mexican uttered one stifled groan, and pitched headlong from his laboring horse. He landed on the ground with a horrible limpness, rolled over and over like a jack-rabbit shot while running, and then moved no more.

The two horses stopped, and Newell rode swiftly up to Margaret, sheathing the smoking pistol. His glance reflected a lively concern for her welfare.

Considering what she had just been through, the girl found herself surprisingly cool, save that her heart was throbbing with painful violence. There was a moment of awkward silence, as he seemed waiting for her to speak.

"You are Mr. Newell, aren't you?" she murmured. "I—I hardly know how to thank you."

Inwardly she scorned herself for that stilted manner of speech, so inadequate an acknowledgment of what this thin-lipped, keen-eyed stranger had done. "It would be much more dramatic if I fainted in his arms, gasping, 'My preserver!'" the notion sending a smile rippling across her face.

Newell, assured that she was unhurt, sat on his horse grinning at her, as if reading the girl's unspoken thoughts. Margaret for an instant was victim of the unpleasant suspicion that he had.

"That was a frightfully feeble vocal effort I made," she said. "But really I am appreciative."

Her eyes fell on the huddled shape of the dead Mexican, and involuntarily she shuddered.

"All heroics aside," she went on, "things looked pretty black for a time." Impulsively she held out her hand, which Newell took.

"Thank you," she said simply.

"Shooting scum like that's a pleasure, Miss Arnold," he assured her. Margaret showed surprise as he called her by name. "Oh, I know who you are. I saw you that morning in Wolf Springs when you asked Burt who I was."

Margaret had the grace to blush at this, stammering an apology.

"Don't say a word," Newell told her easily. "No crime in asking a chap's name, is there? I reckon I ought to feel flattered that you took notice of me."

"I thought you were a man I had seen before," Margaret explained in some confusion.

"Was I?" he asked boldly.

"I don't know. I guess not," she rejoined, half angry at the embarrassment she felt in his presence.

That old vexing question came up with renewed force. Had she seen Rad Newell before? The impulse to blurt out a query as to whether he had taken part in the train robbery was almost uncontrollable. For an instant she remained silent, her thoughts wrestling with the problem.

"How come you're so far from the Circle Cross, Miss Arnold, if I might ask?" Red spoke respectfully, voicing a natural curiosity.

Margaret told him briefly of her ride and its near-tragic outcome.

"It was very foolish of me, I suppose," she concluded.

"Yes, ma'am," he assented gravely. "I'd say it was right foolish. Likely your cousin Burt is plumb crazy by now, troubled over where you are. He'd figure you were lost, but wouldn't know where to look."

"How far am I from the ranch?" Margaret asked.

"It's all of fifteen miles."

"As far as that!" she gasped in dismay.

"Burt will be desperately worried, and it will be long after dark before I can get home. I wonder— Could I impose further on your generosity, Mr. Newell?"

"You don't expect I was counting on letting you go alone, ma'am!" Rad exclaimed, obviously hurt at the inference. "We'd best be starting."

The sun was touching the horizon, painting the western sky with a blaze of barbaric colors. Newell's eyes were fixed on the glorious sight with a dreamy, wistful expression.

"You don't see anything like that back East, do you, Miss Arnold?" he remarked, nodding toward the vast canvas hung before them. "I reckon I've watched that sunset a thousand times, and it's never twice the same. We don't have a chance to get lonely, here in the range country, with pictures like that to look at. It makes a fellow feel right humble, Miss Arnold. It's like a spell, kind of. You can't do it justice with words."

"An artist would revel in the sight," Margaret said, glancing at her companion curiously.

"I'm not doubting he would, but it don't seem that any artist could do the subject justice with paint any more than I can with words. God's the greatest painter of 'em all, Miss Arnold. Trouble is His pictures don't last; lots of 'em, that is. You got to take 'em as they come."

Margaret Arnold felt dazed. Here was a cowboy—a ranchman, rather—accused of rustling, and identified in her mind, whether rightly or wrongly, with a train holdup, and yet talking in terms of simple, heartfelt ap-

preciation of God and the beauty He had placed in the world. The combination obviously did not fit, leaving the answer to her puzzle farther away than ever.

She stole a glance at Rad Newell's eyes. They were kindly eyes, soft gray in tint, but she recalled that only a few minutes before they had blazed with savage ferocity as he came up to her, his smoking pistol still hot from belching forth the Mexican desperado's death warrant.

She began comparing them to Sam Mattson's eyes, to the hopeless disadvantage of the latter. The eyes of both men held a reserve, but of a far different type. Rad's invited trust and abiding confidence; they were honest, attractive eyes, glowing with warm lights, and at times the reserve wholly vanished, especially when he smiled. Sam's, with their cold lack of expression, repelled. In a vague way they reminded Margaret of the unblinking, lidless glare of a huge python that had gazed at her from behind thick plate glass in the Bronx Zoo.

In spite of the loathing and disgust that the big snake had inspired, its eyes yet held for her a mysterious and dreadful sort of fascination. In less degree the same was true with Sam Mattson.

The colors of the sunset were slowly fading as the two turned their horses and began the long ride to the Circle Cross.

"How did you happen to be in this locality when I was in such desperate need of a friend?" Margaret asked.

He glanced at her with a strange, searching expression, as if seeking what might lie back of the innocent question.

"I was riding on business, ma'am," was his cryptic reply.

Margaret thought of her cousin's accusations, and wondered whether the business that called Rad Newell into this desolate region might have something to do with cattle stealing, at the same time blaming herself for the ingratitude of the thought.

She felt unaccountably drawn toward her benefactor, as indeed she had been drawn toward the unknown train robber seen by the uncertain flicker of a match in the dimness of early dawn. Was that further proof of their identity.

Darkness deepened rapidly as they rode

onward, and Margaret marveled at the sureness with which Newell proceeded; evidently he knew the country well. He rolled a cigarette, deftly twisting up the shreds of tobacco without slackening the steady lope of his powerful black horse.

Margaret watched as the match flared. She saw his lean, firm jaws outlined by its quick flash, and all doubts vanished. Now, at last, she knew. Her rescuer and the train robber were one and the same man. An outlaw! Cattle rustler and train robber! Burt's suspicions must be well founded, it seemed, for a man who would take part in robbing the express safe of a Southern Pacific train would certainly not hesitate at stealing cattle when the opportunity offered.

"But I can't understand it," Margaret mused unhappily, her heart bitter at the certainty of this knowledge. She had fought against the unwelcome conviction. "A man who has saved me from worse than death, a man whom I would be glad to own as a friend— And to find that he's a criminal, probably with a price on his head!"

Her lips quivered with pain. This man with his clear, fearless eyes and his profound appreciation of nature's beauties—an outlaw! She shuddered at the hideous word, glad that the darkness prevented her companion from seeing how deeply she was affected.

Miles slipped away behind them, Margaret having little idea of the distance covered. At length Newell pulled up his horse, pointing out a dark mass looming ahead, dusky in the faint starlight.

"That's the butte in front of the Circle Cross buildings," he said. "The trail from Wolf Spring lies just beyond."

The horses walked slowly ahead, and suddenly the ranch lights sprang into view.

"I'll be leaving you now, ma'am," Newell said quietly.

"But you must come with me," she protested. "Can't you give Burt a chance to add his thanks to mine? He will feel as much under obligation to you as I do."

"I better not, Miss Arnold," he muttered. "Not this time. And I was going to ask a favor of you, if you'd be so kind. I'd prefer you didn't tell your cousin about

what's happened. You could say you got lost, and rode till you finally saw the ranch lights. That would be true, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," Margaret rejoined tonelessly, "it would be true, I suppose."

"I know it seems odd, me asking you this, ma'am," Rad went on, as if trying to justify himself in her eyes. "But I've got certain reasons."

In dumb misery, trying to throttle the ache gnawing at her heart, Margaret assented. She could well imagine what those reasons were.

"Won't I see you again?" she asked.

"Some time, I hope," was his husky reply, and then the darkness swallowed him and his black horse.

Soberly, disconsolately, Margaret rode on alone to the ranch.

Burt was leading a pony from the corral as she approached.

"Thank God, you're back, Margaret!" he gasped. "All the boys are out searching. I waited for awhile, hoping you'd return and wanting to be on hand when you did, but I couldn't stand it any longer. What happened?"

In a few words Margaret explained, saying nothing of her adventure with the Mexicans. It was a small favor to the man who had done so much for her; she could do no less than grant his request, as in fact she had tacitly agreed to do.

To her vast relief, Burt accepted the explanation without question. Drawing his gun, he fired three shots into the air, evenly spaced.

"That's the signal of your safe return," he said. "Those that hear will pass it on, and in that way all will get the message. Listen."

Far in the distance sounded three answering shots; then three others, still fainter, from a different direction.

"The boys will be back directly," Burt remarked. "Weren't you frightened, Margaret?"

"I was scared stiff, Burt," she confessed, managing to smile at him.

"You poor kid!" he sympathized. "I don't blame you for being upset. It was a mighty serious business. But all right now, isn't it, old girl?"

"Yes, Burt," she responded, "everything's all right now."

In her heart, however, Margaret knew that everything was not all right. Far from it.

Burt insisted on her eating a hearty supper, and Margaret yielded to his well meant coercion, though food was the last thing on earth she wanted. Pleading weariness, she retired early to her room.

Her eyes burned with unshed tears, brain whirling dizzily in the stress of emotion which gripped her.

"A train robber and a cattle rustler!" she moaned. "And God help me, I believe I love him! I can't help it. Why did things have to turn out this way? But he can't be bad. His eyes are so tender and wistful. No man with such honest eyes could be a hardened criminal. Those eyes can't lie."

But ugly facts remained that obstinately would not down, spitefully thrusting themselves into her mind. Finally Margaret fell into a troubled, dream-haunted sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

MARGARET awoke late the following morning, gripped by the disquieting sense of unreality. It seemed that the startling events of the preceding afternoon had happened ages ago, and yet she still felt strangely conscious of Rad Newell's nearness.

She glanced from her window, perceiving three saddled horses at the rail before the ranch house. One of the animals she recognized as belonging to Sam Mattson. A prey to vague forebodings, the very namelessness of which inspired fear, Margaret quickly dressed and went downstairs. Voices sounded from the room that served Burt as a sort of office. Sharpelessly she listened.

"We've got that bird where the hair is short," Mattson was saying solemnly. "It's been a long time coming, but here she is. You tell Arnold what you ran into this morning, Slim."

"I did, Slim." marked with three fresh branded calves. "The double bar arrow. That's

the brand this fellow Newell registered. They should have had a circle cross on 'em, those calves, Mr. Arnold."

"Where was this?" Burt demanded.

"Down in the broken bad land country, near Elephant Butte."

Margaret's face paled. That big mass of rock which had at first deceived her was roughly suggestive of an elephant in shape.

"You ain't been branding any calves lately, have you, Burt?" Mattson put in.

"Not a calf," Burt declared grimly. "Put it off too long, looks like. Find any trace of dead cows, Slim? Those calves were probably artificial orphans."

Margaret had learned enough during her stay at Burt's ranch to understand the point of her cousin's question. A cow accompanied by a calf with a different brand was plain evidence of crooked work, and rustlers might shoot the mother to cover up their tracks. She listened intently as the unseen person called Slim spoke again.

"We found one dead cow. Coyotes had messed the carcass up considerable, but they was a circle cross on her right flank."

"That's enough," Burt snapped. "It's what I've been waiting for."

"It's enough, all right," Sam grunted, "but there's more. Yesterday we discovered four Double Bar Arrow calves running with a bunch of my stock. It don't take much to change that M brand of mine to a double bar arrow. The brands on these four had been touched up with a running iron, and in one of 'em the lad botched his job. Probably would have cleared up after the scars healed, but we struck the evidence too quick."

"All right," Burt said crisply. "What's your plan?"

"Are you in with us on this?" Mattson inquired significantly.

"Of course I am."

"To the limit, I mean. You get me, Burt?"

"Yes, I get you." There was just a trace of hesitation in Burt's voice, but it quickly disappeared. "It's a black business, but the thing's got to be done. We may as well be the goats for the good of the country as a whole."

"I thought you'd look at it that way."

Now here's my idea on the matter. You pick a couple of men you can trust, and I'll take these two from my outfit. That 'll be plenty, because Newell's alone on his ranch now. To-night we'll ride down there, surprise that bird, and give him a speedy trial. Outside of us, no one 'll know what's happened.

"I don't mean that exactly. They will know what's happened to Newell all right, and why, but folks won't know who's back of it, and won't try to find out. It 'll be a damned good warning to any other rustlers that might feel the urge to operate in this vicinity."

Margaret waited to hear no more. Deliberately she moved a chair, making noise enough to advertise her presence. The voices at once ceased, and presently Burt entered the room.

"I want to talk to you," Margaret whispered. "Sam Mattson, too."

"Oh, Sam, come here," Burt called.

Margaret faced the two tensely.

"I overheard what you are planning to do," she accused them. "You must not. It's too horrible."

"You shouldn't have listened, Margaret," Burt said sternly.

"Perhaps not, but I couldn't help it. Promise me, both of you, that you won't carry through this wicked scheme."

"Now see here, Margaret," Burt protested, "Sam and I are involved in a business that doesn't concern you at all. I'm mighty sorry you learned what's up, but your knowing can't be allowed to interfere. You don't understand."

"I understand enough to know that you and Sam are plotting murder," she told them stonily.

"You've got the wrong slant on it, Margaret," Burt spoke patiently, as though explaining something to a little child. "Law and order, as you are familiar with them back East, don't exist out here in the range country. We have to be a law unto ourselves. Cattle stealing is an ugly crime, and has to be dealt with accordingly."

"Don't do it, Burt," she begged. "Please don't! When were a few stolen calves worth a human life?"

Burt glanced helplessly at Sam Mattson,

sending out an S O S call for reinforcement. Sam responded to the signals.

"It's a matter of viewpoint, Miss Arnold," said he. "The fact is that if we don't punish this fellow chances are that nobody else will. He'll go on rustling calves and grown steers, too, when he gets a chance. Others will see him getting away with it, and conclude that it's safe to take a hand in the game themselves. And in two-three years the cattle business has gone blooie. If we move now the thing will be nipped in the bud. We've got to act in self-defense."

"You can't justify it," Margaret cried. "Nothing that you can say will justify a cold-blooded murder like this. Please don't do it—promise me!"

Burt glanced at her in quick suspicion.

"There's something back of this, Sam," he said shrewdly in a tone inaudible to the girl. "She acted funny when we ran into Rad at Wolf Springs."

He turned to Margaret.

"What's Rad Newell to you?" he asked gently. "Why are you so interested in what happens to him?"

She looked at them fearfully, timidly.

"I don't want him or any man murdered in cold blood. Two wrongs never yet made a right."

"That's not the whole story. You're hiding something. I want to do the right thing, and if there's any special reason why Newell shouldn't pay the penalty for cattle stealing, you'd do well to tell us. Have you seen Newell lately—since we met him in Wolf Springs?"

Dumbly she nodded, unwilling to break her implied promise of the evening before, yet realizing that she must break it.

"When?" Burt persisted, a harsh note creeping into his voice.

"He saved my life—saved more than my life." The words were forced from her reluctant lips. Slowly she told them of the attack on her by the three Mexicans and of Rad's timely rescue.

"That sure puts a new angle on the proposition," Burt remarked. "You're worth more to me than all my cattle. But why didn't you tell me last night?"

Margaret had dreaded that inevitable question.

"He asked me not to," she faltered, fully conscious how damaging that admission must be, for if Rad was innocent, why should he wish Burt Arnold to remain in ignorance of where he had been?

"Where did you meet him?" Sam Mattson asked, with a meaning look at Burt.

"I don't know. I was lost, with no idea of my location."

"Was it down in what we call the bad land country?"

In silent misery she nodded assent.

"And that's where those calves were branded. Slim said the burns were so fresh they might have been done yesterday. Likely Rad was chasing up mavericks when he happened into you and the greasers."

"It's a lucky thing for Rad Newell that Margaret was lost down there," Burt said. "My account is wiped off the books. A fellow that did what Newell did for one of my womenfolks don't owe me anything. The debt's the other way now, looks like."

Margaret flashed him a smile of thanks.

"And what about you?" she asked eagerly of Mattson. "Can't you be as generous as Burt?"

"I reckon I can, Miss Arnold," he responded frankly, but his eyes, those poker eyes, remained as expressionless as ever.

What sinister motives lay behind them? Margaret would have given worlds to know. They were now fixed on her with a cold, calculating gleam.

Frightened she stared back into them, a feeling of helplessness chaining her whole body. She thought of the huge mottled python, sleekly coiled in its cage, glaring out at the curious world before it through eyes like Sam Mattson's.

Weakly she struggled against the baleful spell, like an animal caught in the power of a serpent's resistless charm. Just when the tension became unbearable, when it seemed to Margaret that she must scream out in a paroxysm of hysteria, Sam casually shifted his glance. Indolently he yawned.

"I'll be moving on, I guess," he told Burt.

His two riders were waiting in the other room, where Sam joined them. They left the ranch house together, passing close by the window near which Margaret stood,

trembling from head to foot, hardly recovered from the ordeal to which Sam Mattson had deliberately subjected her, as if in ruthless testing of his powers. It had happened so quickly that she knew Burt suspected nothing.

As the men went by the open window she heard Sam say in a low tone.

"Arnold's got cold feet. We'll do the job ourselves—to-night."

It was little more than a whisper, yet her ears seemed unusually keen. Margaret knew that she had heard correctly. Hardly had they ridden away when she turned to Burt.

"Sam Mattson lied just now," she gasped in a panic. "He's going on with that plot without you."

"No, he won't do that," Burt assured her. "Sam's word is good."

"It isn't." Margaret affirmed positively. "I know Sam Mattson better than you do, Burt. He's bad inside."

"What gives you any such wild notion?"

"It shouts in his actions. And just now I overheard him say to his men that they'd have to go on with it alone."

"Why, that's nonsense, Margaret," Burt cried. "Sam Mattson couldn't have said anything of the sort. You misunderstood. You're all upset over what you've been through and you're letting yourself imagine things."

"It's not imagination. Can't you see that Sam Mattson isn't playing fair with us; that he's bent on destroying Rad Newell?"

Burt laughed indulgently.

"Forget that, Margaret. Sam thinks the world of you, and it isn't likely he'd go on with the scheme against Newell after learning what the fellow did. I don't like Newell any more than before, and he'll get what's coming to him sooner or later, but not from me. My hands are tied now, and it's the same with Sam Mattson. Matter of fact, I'm glad of an excuse to pass up the dirty work. I guess Sam is too."

"Won't you ride over to Newell's place and warn him?" She begged unwisely.

Burt showed signs of losing his patience.

"Gad, Margaret," he said sharply, "you're carrying this thing too far! Why

should I warn him? And of what? That he'll get into trouble if he keeps on stealing my cattle? There'd be gun play right away if I made any such crack."

Margaret said no more, realizing the futility of argument. Burt was regarding her suspiciously. Margaret had already determined that she herself would ride to Newell's ranch to tell him of his danger, and for an instant was seized with panic lest Burt had read that resolve in her face. If so he gave no indication.

"You'd better take it easy for a while," he remarked gently. "Try to forget all the ugly things you've seen and heard lately."

"I guess I've had too much excitement," she confessed, hoping to allay whatever suspicions might have come up in her cousin's mind. "What are you going to do to-day?" She tried to make her voice sound casual.

"Nothing special. That fence job ought to be rushed through, but the boys can finish it without me, I reckon. Want to go for a ride somewhere?"

"I don't believe so, Burt," was her reply, wondering what excuse she could drum up for getting rid of Burt. It was clear that he would not allow her to go to Rad's ranch on any pretext.

"He'd stop me, if he knew I was planning it," she reasoned. "But I've just got to go."

The forenoon dragged endlessly. Burt busied himself with odd jobs about the ranch house, always managing to keep in Margaret's vicinity. She could not be certain whether this was through accident or design, trusting that it might be the former.

Early in the afternoon, to her relief, a diversion came when one of the fence builders rode back to the ranch. They had encountered difficulties regarding the exact location of part of the line. Burt's presence was necessary to settle matters.

"I don't like to leave you alone again, but it looks like I've got to," he told Margaret regretfully.

As soon as Burt and the rider disappeared Margaret hurried to the stable and saddled her horse. An instant later she was riding swiftly away, headed for Rad

Newell's distant ranch. She had never been there, of course, but knew the trail well, for several previous rides had carried her within a mile or two of the place.

As she rode onward the girl tried to disguise from herself the real motive behind her errand.

"I can't do any less," she reasoned. "Mr. Newell saved my life yesterday; now I am only squaring the obligation in warning him of his own danger."

That was true enough, so far as it went. But deep in her heart Margaret knew that more was involved. She longed to see Rad again; wanted to hear once more the sound of his voice. The disquieting unrest that had afflicted her gradually gave way to a feeling of serenity, of happiness in the consciousness that she was granted an opportunity of serving this man who had come to occupy so big a place in her thoughts.

Realizing that the meeting with Rad Newell would not be without its embarrassing aspects, she began pondering over what she should say, how best to word the warning she brought. Sunk in these reflections, Margaret failed for a time to note that a horseman was stealthily trailing her, concealed from view by the increasing ruggedness of the country.

The trail to Newell's ranch struck through the edge of the bad lands, a region of rain sculptured topography, where the soft shales and harder, uptilted sandstones had yielded in striking fashion to the age-old processes of erosion.

It was sheer chance that at last gave Margaret an indistinct glimpse of the rider. The girl's first reaction was that this man must be Burt, who, missing her on his return to the Circle Cross, had instantly divined her plan and followed to prevent its execution. The surprising thing was that he had got back to the ranch so quickly.

Margaret pushed on at greater speed, musing over this idea, which seemed less plausible as she considered it.

"Burt wouldn't sneak along like a spy," she reasoned. "He'd want to overtake me at once, and make me go back to the ranch with him."

An occasional glance to the rear showed that the unknown horseman still followed

at about the same distance, having increased his pace to equal hers. Worried and not a little frightened at this unexpected development, Margaret obeyed a sudden impulse and dashed up a shallow coulee to the left, trusting that the sun-baked surface of the ground would be hard enough to conceal the fact that she had abandoned the trail.

"I'll do some spying on my own account," was the thought in her mind. "It might be a good plan to find out who this modest stranger is."

By good luck the spot she had selected proved ideal for her purpose. The coulee circled the base of a sandstone hill, the slopes of which were covered with large, uneven masses of the eroded bedrock..

It occurred to Margaret that the summit of this hill might afford a vantage ground from which she could survey the trail below and still remain hidden. Near the top she dismounted, and taking advantage of the available cover, peered cautiously down on the course she herself had been following.

For a moment no one was to be seen, but even before Margaret had time to fear that her ruse would fail, a horse came into sight. It was ridden by Sam Mattson.

A conflict of emotions seethed in Margaret's brain at this unwelcome spectacle. The attack on Rad Newell would probably not be staged until darkness made it safer and easier to carry on Mattson's evil designs. What, then, was the latter doing here at this time of the afternoon?

"I wonder if Sam could have intended me to overhear what he said to his men this morning," Margaret asked herself, startled at the new train of possibilities which now loomed before her. "Perhaps he thought I'd come to warn Rad Newell; perhaps he even wanted me to. I know he's bad at heart. But how bad?"

Eagerly she watched the man below. Sam paused a moment when he reached the place where Margaret had left the trail, and the girl's body grew tense, fearing that the marks of her pony's sharp hoofs might show in the hardened clay. Mattson glanced idly around, as though in no particular hurry to move on, while Margaret's anxiety increased.

Suddenly Sam looked ahead in quickened interest as a rider came down the trail toward him, one of the men who had been at the Circle Cross that morning.

The two talked together, though the distance was too great for Margaret to distinguish what they said. Apparently the newcomer was protesting, volubly denying charges that Mattson made.

"I was supposed to be caught between them," Margaret told herself in sudden comprehension. "That's why Sam wasn't in a hurry. Now he's blaming this other fellow for letting me slip by. That's once luck smiled on me. But what's it all about?"

No immediate answer to this question occurred to her, though it was obvious that Sam wanted to catch her and that his plans were highly questionable. The locality was far too dangerous to linger in, and Margaret realized that the hill top afforded no real concealment, for Mattson must know that she could not be far away.

Quickly she went back to her horse and mounted, her plan being to cut in on the trail again at a safe distance above the spot where Sam and his retainer had missed her. She would then be fairly close to Newell's ranch. How to get back to the Circle Cross was a problem left to the future.

This plan was never carried out, for just as Margaret was beginning to breathe freely in the belief that she had escaped her pursuers, a mounted man abruptly appeared from one of the numerous side pockets of the gully she followed, seizing her bridle rein before Margaret was well aware of his presence. It was one of the Mexicans who had attacked her the evening before.

"Ah, *señorita!*" he exclaimed triumphantly. "You are well met!"

She could only stare silently at the grinning ruffian, crushed by this last cruel blow of unkind fortune.

"Come, *señorita!*" the Mexican commanded imperiously. "This time you shall not escape. But do not fear, *señorita*. I will not harm you."

The fellow indeed regarded her with a certain air of respectful consideration which had been missing during their former en-

counter. Margaret was at a loss to account for it.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked steadily.

"To the cave of *El Capitan*. Come, *señorita*!"

Keeping a firm grip on Rex's bridle rein, the Mexican rode on at a brisk pace through the labyrinth of intersecting gullies, swinging farther into the heart of the bad lands. Margaret perceived that she was in no immediate danger, yet the future was black with ominous clouds. Newell had once saved her by his fortuitous arrival on the scene; that he should appear again was too wildly improbable.

Even in her own extremity Margaret could not forget the plot that hung over the suspected rustler. Unwarned of his danger Rad would inevitably fall victim to Sam Mattson's attack.

It seemed to Margaret that she must elude the Mexican as much for Rad's sake as her own, resolving to make a sudden dash for liberty the instant her captor's caution relaxed in the slightest degree. She noted carefully the course they were pursuing, so that in the happy event of effecting an escape she would not have to rely on blind chance in getting back to the familiar country bordering the trail.

But the Mexican showed no signs of giving her an opportunity to escape. The country grew rougher as they penetrated deeper into the bad lands, a region of steep slopes, with frowning cliffs of parti-colored sandstones.

Presently they entered a narrow cañon, rounding a bend to come upon the dark opening of a cave, before the entrance to which sprawled in distorted awkwardness the body of a man. It was plain that he was dead.

"*Madre de Dios!*" the Mexican exclaimed.

Apparently forgetful of his captive in the alarm of this fresh discovery the fellow leaped to the ground, darting toward the motionless body. He gave it but a single startled glance; then disappeared within the cave at the same time that Margaret whirled her horse. The chance had come at last.

In a final inspiration she reached out and seized the rein of the Mexican's mount. The animal reared back viciously, but desperately Margaret clung to the narrow ribbon of leather, determined to take the brute with her and so prevent any possibility of recapture.

Rex lunged ahead, the other horse yielding, though reluctantly. It put a drag on their speed, Margaret's arm being cruelly wrenched. They had covered but a short distance when she heard a hoarse shout from behind, indicating that the Mexican had emerged from the cave to discover his captive's flight.

Margaret bent low on Rex, in anticipation of his next move—a pistol shot. It came, and at the sound the bridle rein was torn from her grasp as the horse behind went down with a crash.

The Mexican's bullet had gone astray; had buried itself in his own unfortunate mount, and Margaret, her mind thus relieved from fear of pursuit, sent Rex on at a plunging gallop. One or two other shots echoed through the cañon, but did no damage. Soon she was beyond pistol range.

"Thank goodness that fellow couldn't shoot as straight as Rad Newell can," she thought. "Now I'm sure I can find my way out, and it can't be many miles to his ranch."

Margaret's thoughts went back to the cave, and that hideous sight at its opening. A flood of unanswered questions rose in her mind.

Who was the dead man? What had happened to him? What connection, if any, did Sam Mattson have with this mysterious cave? And who was *El Capitan*, referred to by the Mexican?

Her brain raced on in time to the thudding hoof beats of the pony. Sam Mattson, Rad Newell, the Mexicans, and even her cousin Burt were mingled together in a puzzling maze of fact and conjecture.

Half an hour of hard riding brought her to the margin of the bad lands, into country that was somewhat familiar. A few minutes later Margaret was again at the trail, urging her pony on with undiminished speed, fearful that even now some last misfortune might interrupt her progress.

With a heart-felt sigh of relief she at length perceived the buildings of the Double Bar Arrow clustered together just ahead. There was at first no sign of life about the place, but as Margaret drew nearer she saw Rad coming from a corral adjoining the main stable.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE DOUBLE BAR ARROW.

NEWELL was obviously surprised at sight of this unexpected visitor, his face breaking into a smile of pleasure as he came forward to greet Margaret, hat in hand.

Suddenly, now that the dangers through which she had come were things of the past, Margaret felt strangely weak. Trembling she slid down from the horse, almost falling. Instantly Rad was beside her.

"What's the matter, Miss Arnold?" he cried anxiously. "You're not sick, are you?"

She smiled at him, a bit wanly.

"No, I'm not sick," she whispered. "I—I suppose you will think me very foolish, Mr. Newell. I—I—come to warn you that your life is in danger."

Rad grinned delightedly.

"Now that's real nice, Miss Arnold. I don't know who it is, but I'm sure grateful to him for his plans, being's it brought you over here to see me."

"There's nothing to joke about," she cried, shocked that he seemed unable to grasp the seriousness of the affair. "Sam Mattson and some of his men are going to kill you to-night."

Rad's face hardened at mention of Mattson's name.

"Why is Sam so keen to have me salivated?" he wanted to know.

Margaret blushed miserably, looking away, unable to meet the steady eyes fixed upon her.

"My feelings ain't so tender that you need worry about bruising 'em, ma'am," he encouraged her. "What are Sam's reasons for desiring me out of the way?"

"He and two of his riders came to the ranch this morning and told Burt that

they'd found Circle Cross calves freshly marked with your brand; some of Sam's too. I overheard them talking. Sam urged Burt to join him, and I'm sorry to say Burt consented. They were to come after you to-night. I pleaded with them, but in vain, and finally I had to break my promise; had to tell them what you had done for me when I was lost in the bad lands."

"You didn't really promise, you know," Rad reminded her.

"I considered it a promise anyway, and wanted to do as you wished. After learning the truth they agreed to give up the plan. I could see that Burt was sincere, but it was very plain that Sam was lying. Later I heard him tell his cowboys that they'd go ahead without Burt. I—I just had to warn you."

"Evidence looked pretty clear that I rustled those calves, didn't it?" Rad softly inquired.

She nodded, still unable to look directly at him.

"And yet you were willing to face the dangers of riding alone in this country, so I'd have a fighting chance against Mattson and his men?"

Again Margaret nodded, silently.

"You believed what Mattson said—that I was branding other men's stock? That I was an ordinary cattle rustler, deserving nothing but a rope or a smoking bullet?"

Margaret lifted her eyes, gazing into his searchingly; what she saw there satisfied her.

"Never mind what I did or didn't believe," she whispered. "I know you're not a cattle rustler." Then she added to herself, inaudibly: "But I would have come anyway."

Rad's face glowed in the long, slanting rays of the sun as it touched the horizon. Again the wondrous play of kaleidoscopic splendor set the western sky a-blaze with gorgeous colors, splashed together in lavish profusion. But neither of the two seemed to notice.

"It was mighty kind of you to do this for me, Miss Arnold," Rad told her. "You should never have run the risks of that trip, but I sure am glad you wanted to

come." He was silent a moment. Then suddenly, as the idea came to him, "You have any trouble on the way, ma'am?"

"That's all passed," Margaret cried impulsively. "It makes no difference now. The important thing now is what you're going to do."

"It makes a heap of difference, if you'll excuse my contradicting you, ma'am. I was just wondering how far those skunks would go. Sam Mattson can't be trusted, Miss Arnold."

"I have distrusted him for some time," she replied. "He knows it. Also that I dislike him as well. Sam and one of his men tried to intercept me on the trail, but by good fortune I avoided the trap," and Margaret told of her adventure at the cave. "Do you think they'll attack us?" she asked.

"I'm expecting it, ma'am," he told her grimly. "I ought to get you away, but it's late now and we might have trouble making the Circle Cross. Likely this spot is as safe as any. I was hoping two-three good friends of mine might show up, but something must have happened to delay 'em. Looks like you'll have to spend the night here, Miss Arnold." His kindly eyes dwelt on her unhappily. "I'm sorry things broke this way. You're not afraid, are you?"

"Of course not!" she smiled. It was wholly true. Margaret felt no fear, only a supreme confidence that Rad Newell was capable of protecting her against all dangers. "We'll do whatever you think best," she added.

"I'd like to get you back to the Circle Cross, but if Mattson knows you've got through his net and reached here, he'll likely have the country well covered. Besides I really ought to stick. If you say the word though, ma'am, I'll gladly try to get you through to your cousin's place."

"Your judgment is better than mine. We'll stay."

"I'll put your horse away then," he assented, and Margaret accompanied him as he led Rex toward the corral.

They had returned to the front of the main building when Margaret noticed Rad looking intently up the trail.

"Some one's coming," he told her quiet-

ly. His eyes wandered searchingly along a rugged, bowlder strewn hill which faced them.

"Do you see anything?" Margaret demanded excitedly, but before Rad could answer Sam Mattson came into view around the base of the hill.

She was astonished and considerably disturbed at the cool, brazen effrontery thus displayed.

"But he probably doesn't know that I recognized him on the trail this afternoon," she thought.

Mattson rode toward them without hesitation, but a different Sam Mattson than she had yet seen. Gone was that carefully guarded air of restraint, as of something zealously held back from public gaze. Now the stamp of evil was plainly written on his features; the bars were down.

"Ah, Miss Arnold!" he said with a mocking politeness as he swung from his mount. "I'm pleased to find you here, after missing you this afternoon. You were more clever than I gave you credit for—or else astonishingly lucky. However your getting here will make things easier for me."

Margaret said nothing, glancing at the man who stood beside her; his eyes narrowed to thin slits, through which glittered, like pin points of light, the threat of an uncompromising, relentless spirit.

Mattson saw this—and laughed.

"Don't try to pull any rough stuff, Newell," he advised. "I know you too well to take chances, and I planted a crack shot in the rocks up there. He's got a rifle bent on you now. If you pull a gun or I wave my arm—he obeys orders."

"Tell me something I don't know," was Newell's cool taunt. "I saw the sun glint on his gun barrel before you came into sight. If you want to live, Sam Mattson, pray that he don't shot. I'd kill you, even with a bullet in my own heart. Wave your arm—and wave yourself into hell."

Mattson's face registered dismay—and even terror, as he stared at the man before him. Newell's gun still sagged in its holster on his right hip, but from some place of concealment a second big pistol had sprouted, held in his left hand which hung limply at his side, hidden from view of the

watcher up in the rocks. The six shooter was cocked, its long blue barrel slanting upward at Mattson's breast.

"You see I've got your ace in the hole coppered, sort of," Rad explained grimly. "Your winning cards don't look so big now, do they? You been around to the cave lately, Sam?"

That shot went home, as Margaret could tell from the startled light that flickered over Mattson's face. Tensely, breathlessly, she watched the drama unfold.

"The cave's all right," Sam grunted.

"Sure, old timer, the cave's all right. But what about the stuff in it? That all right too, I wonder? I was there to-day. Your guard's plumb ruined, if I'm any judge."

Mattson's face flamed.

"Damn you, Newell!" his arm half lifted.

"Easy, Sam!" Rad cautioned sharply. "The trigger pull on my six-gun is mighty light, and I'm crowding her some with my finger already. We've come to the show-down. Go into the house, please, Miss Arnold. Now you, Sam, walk over close to me, in front, so your friends will have to shoot through your worthless hide to get me. Hurry up! That's fine!" as Mattson, after a hesitating glance at the yawning muzzle of Newell's pistol, concluded to follow instructions.

Rad backed toward the open door, eyes never leaving Mattson, though they seemed to be taking in the hillside at the same time. Once inside, Newell bolted the door, his gun still covering the silently fuming Mattson. Rad's next move was to relieve Sam of his own weapons.

"You'll find a pair of handcuffs hanging on a nail in that closet," he told Margaret. "Will you please get 'em, ma'am? I'm sure yearning to decorate Sam Mattson with that brand of jewelry."

She found the handcuffs without trouble, marveling that Rad should have equipment of the sort available. Her eyes fell on several shapeless, bulging objects lying on the floor. A closer glance showed them to be U. S. mail bags, plunder of the Southern Pacific robbery.

In a daze Margaret emerged from the closet, silently giving the steel bracelets to

Rad, who snapped them shut on his captive's wrists.

"That pulls your cork, Sam," Newell said with a triumphant grimness. "Guess you suspicioned I was working for the railroad, from the trouble you took to get rid of me. Now you know it for a fact," and he finished the job by deftly hogtying Sam to a chair.

Mattson swore viciously.

"Shut up!" was Rad's harsh command. "I'm plumb honing for an excuse to man-handle you, Sam—turning your filthy greasers loose on a girl like Margaret Arnold. And they's another matter. Remember that express messenger your gang shot up two years ago in the holdup at Baker's siding? He was my brother. I've been camped on your trail ever since. The game is up."

A fierce joy throbbed in Margaret's heart at these words. Rad Newell was vindicated. Why had she ever doubted him, even for an instant?

"It was *you* I saw beside the train at the robbery!" she cried.

"I was there, ma'am," he replied in astonishment. "Did you see me?"

She nodded.

"That's why I asked Burt about you. But how did you make Wolf Springs so quickly?"

"I got to town the same way you did, ma'am," he grinned. "On the train. It was part of my work in busting up Sam Mattson's gang of hell raisers. He's the leader, in spite of his parading around as a decent citizen. They call him *El Capitan*."

Rad took down a Winchester from its rack, experimentally working the lever. Margaret had just taken in the fact that the ranch house was built like a fort, of solid logs with very narrow slit-like windows. Light came through larger openings higher up, above the danger level of bullets. Apparently the place dated back to the days of Indian warfare.

Newell glanced warily out; then suddenly snapped the rifle to his shoulder and fired. A fusillade of answering shots thudded into the logs.

"Got him!" Rad grunted in keen satis-

faction, glancing back at Margaret with a reassuring grin. "Don't worry, Miss Arnold. Their bullets won't punch through the wall. Keep out of line of the windows though."

"How many are there?" she cried, eyes shining with the thrill of excitement.

It was like a story. Rad fighting for her; defending her against a horde of outlaws. She derived a sweet comfort in the thought that he was near, rejoicing in the cool, confident efficiency with which he handled his weapon.

"Plenty," Rad told her. "You're in a regular hornets' nest now, Miss Arnold."

"I'm not afraid," Margaret smiled at him. "What can I do to help, Rad?" Never before had she called him by his first name.

Newell's rifle spoke again.

"Keep in a safe place," almost gruffly, as a fresh shell clicked into the firing chamber of the Winchester. "This isn't going to be any Sunday school picnic."

"Shall I watch for you on the other side?" Margaret asked eagerly. "Won't they attack from that direction?"

"No danger—yet. You see they haven't any cover on that side, so they'll stick to the rocks while it's daylight."

"See here, Newell," Mattson spoke up, his voice sullen with defiance. "You can't hold out long against that crowd. They'll tear you to pieces before morning."

"You think so, do you?" Rad retorted coolly.

"I know it. Why not make a dicker with me? Turn me loose, and I'll call 'em off."

Rad's reply to this was a mirthless laugh.

"I mean it," Mattson insisted. "You've no right to expose Miss Arnold to a battle like this. A stray bullet might kill her."

"Don't trust him, Rad!" Margaret cried anxiously. "He wouldn't keep his word. Some things are worse than stray bullets."

"You don't know me, ma'am, if you believe for a minute I'd take a chance of that skunk's getting his slimy paws on you," Newell said reproachfully. "He can't make any proposition I'd accept. But just the same I'm mighty sorry you're in on this jam. Perhaps I should have started for the Circle Cross as soon as you got here. I did

what I thought was for the best, ma'am. I'm hoping you're convinced of that."

"Don't!" she protested, seeing how deeply concerned he was over her danger. "We'll win together, you and I."

"That's the talk!" Rad's voice was again cheerful.

He moved to another porthole, taking two swift snap shots at some target invisible to her. But when he next spoke his voice was hard.

"I'm making you one promise, ma'am. Whatever happens, no matter how bad things go at the end, Sam Mattson won't get you, nor will any of his men."

He looked steadily at her, a longing wistfulness in the depths of his kindly gray eyes, and as Margaret gazed back at him, her lips parted, a flash of subtle comprehension seemed to pass between them.

"I understand," Margaret whispered, bravely accepting the sinister implication back of that promise.

"I just wanted to tell you," and Rad turned to a porthole, looking out into the fast gathering dusk.

Shots from the rocks above showed as occasional flashes. Margaret came and stood beside him, back of the bulwark of protecting logs.

"Did Mattson brand those calves he accused you of stealing?" she asked softly.

"He had 'em branded, I guess. Likely didn't do it himself."

"But why?"

"I'm thinking it was because he thought it would help get me out of the way, without throwing suspicion on him. Especially if he could sew up some man like your cousin on the job. Me being caught red-handed rustling cattle gave him a good excuse. Twice he's tried to have me salivated, but his killers didn't have any luck a-tall. I reckon Sam was getting plumb desperate. I knew too much for him to feel right happy and comfortable."

"What I can't understand is how Burt came to be taken in by such a desperado. He seemed to think Mattson was a fine fellow."

"Your cousin's all right, Miss Arnold, only he's lacking in judgment. He's too easy going; too ready to accept other folks

on their own say-so. And likely Mattson was always on guard when around him, so as not to give himself away. For that matter he's fooled a lot of people besides your cousin."

"Are you really worried, Rad?" she asked softly. "I mean about our getting out all right."

"We've got a chance, and I'm counting on our making it O. K. I expect inside an hour it'll be settled, one way or the other."

"What do you mean? Will your friends come?"

"I'm afraid not in time to be of any use. What I was getting at was this. The moon is about full now, and after it's up this country will be pretty light—plenty enough for shooting. But before it rises things are going to be murky. Light puts the odds in our favor, so naturally they'll pick the dark time for their big noise. If they should take a notion to rush in from all sides I'd have my hands full stopping 'em."

"Do you think they know you have their plunder hidden here?"

"You saw it, did you? Had to tell how much they know. Depends on whether that greaser you left at the cave got word to 'em before the gang closed in here. Nothing much we can do but wait. I got one good card up my sleeve that I can play when the time comes."

It was growing rapidly darker, possible to distinguish objects in the room but dimly. Mattson sat silent in the chair to which Rad had lashed him. Margaret could feel his eyes boring at her through the blackness, and she shuddered at the consciousness of how narrowly she had escaped his evil designs. Had they succeeded it was doubtful whether Burt would have suspected his false friend; in fact Margaret shrewdly inferred that Mattson planned to convince Burt that Newell, pictured as their common enemy, was responsible for her disappearance.

The scattering fire from the hidden outlaws had died away. She tried to imagine what they were doing, what deviltry they might be plotting out there in the darkness that had settled down on the landscape like an enveloping blanket.

Newell moved restlessly from one lookout to another. The minutes dragged on,

the mere fact that the bandits remained unseen and unheard increasing the tension. Rad spoke to Margaret from time to time, quietly and reassuringly, as though he realized the overwrought condition of her nerves. The sound of his voice helped her endure the dreadful strain of waiting, but at last she felt that she must do something or go mad; she could stand it no longer.

"Let me watch on the far side, in the other room," she pleaded. "They aren't shooting now, and it will be safe enough. Then if an attack should come I might be able to warn you."

Rad yielded without protest.

"Give me a pistol," she added. "I can't shoot very straight, but I could at least make a noise with it."

"Don't run any risk, ma'am," Newell warned her as he passed over a Colt. "Remember that if you shoot the flash gives 'em a target."

"I'll be careful," she promised, and a few seconds later the girl stood peering out through one of the narrow windows, Newell's gun tightly gripped in her icy hand.

At once her imagination began to run wild, and she could find a lurking foe in every stone or fence post, vaguely seen in the dusk. If the attack would only come! So she waited, nerves stretched taut, expecting she knew not what.

An indistinct object, perhaps a hundred feet from the ranch house, seemed to move. Fearfully, intently, Margaret watched, her weapon leveled on it, holding back an almost uncontrollable desire to press the trigger and end the suspense. Finally she was convinced that her eyes had tricked her.

Then she saw something else move, no doubt about it this time. Margaret was on the point of calling a soft warning to Rad when with startling suddenness she heard his rifle crash, shots rattling forth too swiftly to be counted.

The slowly moving object on her side developed into a man, who darted toward the building; others materialized in the darkness; they seemed coming from all directions with bewildering speed.

She thrust the revolver through the opening, firing at these uncertain targets; one, she thought, fell, and a savage feeling of

satisfaction thrilled her. All the girl's instinctive notions regarding the sanctity of human life had vanished. It was kill or be killed.

One of the bandits loomed up directly in front of the porthole, firing through at her. Margaret was almost blinded by the flash, as powder grains burned into her bare arms like stinging, biting insects. Convulsively her finger closed on the trigger of the Colt, and the outlaw dropped with an oath of mingled pain and surprise.

A mutter of voices sounded around the corner of the building. Then came a moment of silence, after which Margaret glimpsed several shadowy figures melting away in the darkness. Savagely she pointed the gun, but its hammer only clicked harmlessly on an exploded cartridge.

Rad Newell came running into the room, and Margaret fled to him, sobbing hysterically. It seemed only natural that she should be in his arms, that he should be tenderly soothing and comforting her. In the reaction following the battle lust she found herself overcome by horror of what she had done.

"Oh, Rad," she moaned, "I just killed a man!" Her body was racked by agonizing shudders.

"That's fine!" he cried. "If you really did. It's nothing to feel bad over. I got three myself."

"Have they gone?" she whispered, relaxing to the blessed comfort of his strong arms about her.

"Looks that way, though they probably haven't gone far. We fooled 'em, firing that way from both sides at once. I'm proud of you, Miss Ar—"

"Why don't you call me Margaret?" she demanded shyly. "I'd like that better."

"It'd suit me better too. I'll be glad to try it next time, being's you suggested it. M—Margaret."

A light glowed outside.

"The moon must be rising," she murmured. "That means we've won, doesn't it, Rad?"

Newell's body suddenly grew tense.

"The moon isn't due for half an hour yet. Listen."

A faint crackling sound came to their

ears, rapidly growing louder. The odor of smoke drifted into the room, the pungent, penetrating smell of burning wood.

Margaret's heart almost ceased to beat. The bandits had set the building on fire.

"That's what I expected they might do," Rad said shortly. "The attack was just to cover up the other attempt. Now they're waiting to pot us when we try to make a run for it."

"That means the end, doesn't it, Rad?" was Margaret's frightened question.

"I wouldn't say so," he told her cheerfully. "Remember that card I spoke of? Most time to play it."

They returned to the room where Sam Mattson was trussed up.

"What's happened?" he cried. "That's smoke I smell?"

"If your smellers are working in good order it's smoke all right," Rad replied coolly.

"My God! Don't they know I'm in here?"

"I guess they do, Sam."

"But where do I get off?"

"Looks like they figure I'm worth more to 'em dead than you are alive," was Rad's callous reply. "Guess they don't value you very highly, Sam."

The sun-dried logs of the ranch house were already blazing fiercely. A paleness born of stark terror showed on Mattson's face in the flickering light reflected into the room from the mounting flames outside.

Newell regarded the cringing man remorselessly. "This is your doing," that glance seemed to say.

"I don't want to fry here, like a rat in a trap," Sam mumbled helplessly. "Give me a chance!"

Rad continued looking at him in contemptuous silence. Mattson struggled frantically and uselessly.

"Let me go while there's time!" he begged. "I'll save both of you too."

"I'd say things have passed out of your control, sort of," Newell told him.

"I'm their leader. They'll do as I say."

"Lucky for us, Sam, we don't need your help," Rad replied, and then he went about his preparations, paying no more attention to Mattson.

He refilled the magazine of his Winchester, buckling two six shooters about his waist. Next Rad entered the closet, bringing out the mail bags which Margaret had already seen there. She watched breathlessly, a vague suspicion as to his plan already taking shape in her mind.

Rad kicked aside a rug made from the hide of a steer, tanned with the hair on, and disclosed a small trapdoor in the floor. This he opened, tossing down the bags.

"That card I spoke of," he explained to Margaret, "is a tunnel, leading to one of the out-buildings. My father built this house years ago, and he figured on having a fire exit in case the Indians ever made things too hot for him. It's going to come in right handy, I'd say. You first, ma'am. Watch your step."

"Going to leave me here to roast?" Mattson screamed.

"No," Rad told him regretfully. "I'm not; though it would be a darned good lesson to you for the future."

A flicker of saturnine humor gleamed in Rad's eyes as he spoke.

"You're a powerful nuisance, Sam, but I'm afraid we'll have to put up with your company a spell longer. For the sake of your worthless carcass I'd recommend that you behave. I'm getting downright peevish at you, Sam."

"And here's one thing it would be well to remember. When we come up for air out yonder, might be some of your friends are close by. Don't get careless with your vocal organs, Sam, or I'll be obliged to save the State the expense of a trial."

With his knife Rad cut enough of Mattson's bonds to permit walking; no more. Then the three descended into the dark tunnel, Rad lowering the trapdoor behind them.

A flight of rude steps led down for a dozen or fifteen feet, where the glow of a match in Rad's hand showed a door. They went through this, Rad making two trips to bring the heavy mail bags.

"We'll leave the plunder here," he said. "Be safe from the fire, and I can get it later. Come on, Margaret. Sam can trail along if he wants to. I won't quarrel with him if he prefers the fire," and taking her

hand in his Rad slowly proceeded through the inky blackness of the tunnel. It was so low that they had to go forward almost on hands and knees.

After what seemed to Margaret an endless time the passage abruptly ended at a second door.

"Easy!" Rad cautioned as he opened it. "There's more steps here. We'll have to feel for 'em. Keep hold of me and you won't stumble. We could stay down here for a while, but the air's bad."

Margaret, in fact, was already feeling faint from breathing the stifling dead atmosphere of the passageway. Her lungs labored painfully.

Newell guided her feet to the stairs, supporting her as they slowly ascended. Cautiously he lifted a match above their heads, and Margaret could look up into a small shed, lighted by the blaze of the burning ranch house, now a seething roaring mass of flames.

As they emerged from the black hole Rad silently pointed through a window towards several men, who watched the conflagration from within the shadow of another outbuilding.

"They're probably wondering why we preferred to roast instead of making a dash," he whispered. "We fooled 'em again, Margaret." The name dropped easily from his lips; it seemed to the girl that she had always known this capable, fearless man whose protecting presence hovered over her like a benediction.

A number of muffled shots rang out; Margaret's eyes sought Rad's in silent questioning.

"Some of my ammunition exploding in the heat," he replied in a low tone. "That's nothing."

"What will the outlaws do now?" she asked.

"Go away, most likely. Nothing to keep 'em. They'll be drifting off like shadows before long."

"Wouldn't you like to stop them, Rad?" she whispered teasingly.

"Lady, don't tempt me," he smiled back. "A minute ago I was figuring out how many of those chaps I could puncture before they woke up."

"You've done enough killing, Rad. I know it had to be, but killing is terrible."

"I wouldn't dare start anything now," he told her.

"Why not?" Margaret knew, but wanted to hear him state the reason.

Reverently his hand caressed the smooth, rounded oval of her cheek.

"Killing bandits is a side issue with me now," Rad whispered. "My regular job is looking after you. How long that job lasts is for you to say, Margaret."

His arm circled her slender body, straining it to him in a passionate tenderness. She lifted her eyes to look into his face, on which the glare from the burning ranch house danced in an eerie play of light and shadow.

Then the magic spell was rudely shattered as pandemonium burst forth—a shrill yip—yip—yip—chorus of wild cowboy yells; shouts of fear and astonishment; the crash of pistol shots.

"Burt Arnold and his riders!" Rad ejaculated. "They've got you figured somewhere in this mess and they're out for a clean-up."

The bandits, taken wholly by surprise, offered no more than a spasmodic resistance; furthermore they were on foot, their mounts some distance away, which proved an additional handicap in giving battle to the Circle Cross cowboys.

"There's Burt!" Margaret gasped, as she saw her cousin riding towards the shed in which she and Newell were concealed.

"Burt, oh, Burt!" she called, running from the small building, Rad at her heels. In her haste to relieve Burt's mind of fears for her safety, Margaret never once considered how this sudden approach must look to him; as if she were fleeing to him from a pursuer.

Not till Burt's smoking pistol snapped up to cover the man behind her did Margaret's brain grasp his purpose.

"Don't shoot, Burt!" she screamed in horror.

She tried to throw herself in front of Newell, to shield his body with her own, but his arm swept her aside. Margaret stumbled to her knees, the roar of Burt's .45 echoing in her ears, while Newell went

down without a sound, motionless. Margaret's terrified eyes missed nothing; her heart was sick within her.

"You've killed him!" Her accusing cry cut the air like a knife.

In a second Margaret was crouching beside the wounded man, piteously calling him by name, fingers fumbling at his clothing in search of his hurt. Arnold, hugely puzzled, swung from his mount and came nearer.

Margaret looked up at him in bitter reproach.

"You've been so blind, Burt!" she cried hysterically. "Can't you see? You made friends with the wrong man!"

With no thought of further explanation, indifferent whether Burt understood or not, Margaret devoted her attention to Newell. The mark of the bullet showed in an ugly blotch on his head. The wound was not deep, yet she thought him dead, tenderly wiping his face with a ridiculously inadequate bit of handkerchief.

Under the lingering touch of her fingers Rad's eyes slowly opened; for an instant they stared blankly at her, then glowed with the light of returning reason and consciousness.

"I'm all right," he muttered. "Just creased me. That's all." He tried to rise, but she gently forced him back, pillowing his head in her lap, smiling down at him through joyous tears.

Burt understood by now a part, at least, of what had happened, vastly relieved to learn that his hasty bullet had not done serious harm. Perceiving that his presence was not in any way required, he slipped quietly away.

"Now about that job I was mentioning, Margaret," Rad went on. "Do I get it?"

"What wages would you expect?" Her voice was a mere whisper scarcely audible, but Rad heard it.

"Big wages, Margaret. Your love till the end of the trail—and beyond. Am I hired?" His eyes, more wistfully longing than ever, stared anxiously up at her.

"You're hired, Rad, dear," came Margaret's soft answer. "And I'll never keep back any of your pay."

"You know I've got a bad reputation,

Margaret." A whimsical smile played on his lips. "Maybe you wouldn't want to marry a rustler."

"Hush!" Margaret commanded severely. "You mustn't say such dreadful things." She bent over, her lips brushing his with a caressing tenderness. "I'm glad you're not a rustler, Rad," she murmured, "but I think I'd love you just the same."

The light from the dying embers of the

ruined ranch house was gradually replaced by a softer, mellow glow from the full moon, hung above the hill tops like a huge ball of burnished gold. In the splendor of that wondrous sight it seemed to Margaret that all sordidness and affliction and evil vanished magically from the earth, leaving only happiness—and a faith which looked forward through clear, untroubled eyes to the future, rich in promise.

THE END



DRIVING THE OVERLAND STAGE

WE have sung of the heroes of peace!
Of the heroes of war and romance!
Of the Knights of the Golden Fleece!
Of wand'ers whose bold deeds entrance!
But I've never yet met with or known
In the life or on printed page
Men whose bravery brighter has shown
Than the guides of the Overland Stage!

For a man who then handled the reins
On an "Overland box" met the test!
He imperiled his life for his pains,
Ev'ry time he rode into the West!
Mayhap women and children inside;
And treasure which bandits might know;
And the driver in full view must ride,
Mark for merciless thug or red foe!

With his rifle at hand on the seat;
One foot on the brakes; reins gripped tight;
Down the perilous path in the heat
Of the day—and then, with the night,
Through the valley where redskins might lurk
To burst with a whoop from their lair;
Or a "road agent" suddenly jerk
The "leaders" aside; standing there

With the driver in line for the ball
Which a move of his hand could invite!
For life was worth nothing at all
To the lawless whose motto was might!
You may sing of your heroes of old!
Of your brave men of washed deck or trail!
But there's not one a candle could hold
To the men of the Overland Mail!

Clarence Mansfield Lindsay.



A Blaze of Glory

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "The Gleaming Blade," "Nothing But Money," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

WILLIAM ALDEN, who tells the story, is of Mayflower stock, but is content to do odd jobs about his native Cape Cod village. He is smitten with Rose Abbott as he meets her when he is delivering parcels at the palatial Abbott summer home. Rose regards him merely as an illiterate native, but one day while he is out fishing in a dory he is given a chance to save her from drowning. Even after that Rose thinks of him, if at all, only as a native to be rewarded with money for doing her a service. Piqued by her attitude, William spurns any monetary reward, and, although twenty-one years old, studies for entrance at Harvard, and that fall matriculates at the university. The second year he makes the football team and the third year helps beat Yale. At the end of his third football season he is elected to the captaincy of the team. Returning to his native Hydepport the following summer, he dons his old clothes, and to be near Rose, hires out to her father as chauffeur. The girl of his dreams takes particular pains to treat him as a menial, but somehow William feels that her irritation has its source in her unwillingness to see him as a servant. So far as he knows his identity as Harvard football captain is hidden from her.

CHAPTER VII.

INTRODUCING G. BURTON ANDERSON.

THE arrival of the house party caused me to begin to earn my wages for the first time. I met every train on Saturday afternoon and delivered a dozen well assorted guests at Abbott's. First came Ambrose Buffington, of New York, and his wife. I knew him by reputation, a railroad owner and Wall Street manipu-

lator. He was a small, wiry, dowdy man with a ragged, brownish-gray mustache, whose wife topped him by half a head, and who was as ponderous and impressive as a steam-roller. She had a voice like a first sergeant and a big, hard, red face. Business reasons could be the only excuse for inviting a pair like this to the Abbott's, and I knew that Rose would hate Mrs. Buffington.

On the next train came two pretty girls,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 14.

Alice and Frances Folsom, also from New York. They were sisters, aged about eighteen and twenty, and were accompanied by their mother, a pretty woman, prematurely gray, but stylish and winsome. On the same train arrived G. Burton Anderson. I hated that fellow from the moment he signaled me to pick up his suit case; there were no such things as red caps at the little station of Hydeport. He was about six feet two, heavily built, assured of himself, handsome in a domineering and aggressive manner, something under thirty in age, tremendously important in his own eyes, almost English in the cut of his clothes, and obviously determined that nobody should underestimate him.

He didn't do me the honor to inspect me at all, just jerked his index finger to the traveling bag, bowed to the ladies who were already in the car, introduced himself gracefully enough, and was soon on familiar terms with them.

He spoke in what New Yorkers term the "Harvard accent," which is very nearly an English accent. Outsiders do not know that such manner of speech is about as unpopular with the bulk of Harvard students as with other Americans; it is the badge of a small set who live on what used to be called the "gold coast," and who "high hat" the ordinary students to their profound resentment. Before the days of Percy Haughton this coterie used to run Harvard athletics. The chance of an unknown and socially unsponsored individual like William Alden making the football team at that period would have been more difficult than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Incidentally the society test for football players used to result in Harvard being regularly trounced by Yale.

I remembered G. Burton Anderson when I came to think about it, as a football man who had graduated during my freshman year. He had played a fair game at guard, and had beaten the football captain for marshal of Class Day because of social connections. He had not come back to assist at coaching, as so many graduate players were wont to do, which was fortunate for me, or he might have put an end to my incognito.

I dumped him at the Abbotts' front door, considerably disgusted at the "la de da" conversation he was carrying on with the impressionable young girls, and went back for more customers.

The next batch consisted of a likable young fellow of about twenty-five named Harry Frazer, a stunning young woman about thirty years of age named Mrs. Luther Barnes, a flapper of seventeen, Estelle Ames, with her mother, Mrs. William Ames; a clergyman, Episcopal persuasion, good-natured and robust, Rev. Foster Clayborn; and a sharp-featured, keen-eyed man, John Gloster, whose status I could not guess.

By dinner time all the guests had turned up, and I was free for a couple of hours. My instinctive dislike for G. Burton Anderson was quickly explained, since I saw him holding the arm of Rose Abbott in a possessive fashion and talking with her earnestly as they walked about in the garden.

"Who is this fellow Anderson?" I asked Higgins, the butler, at dinner. I had patched up a truce with the butler after our first dispute.

"Of course you wouldn't know," he said, patronizing as usual. "It isn't settled yet, you understand, and nothing must be said or even whispered—"

"Who is he?" I repeated impatiently.

"He is probably going to be the husband of Miss Rose."

I set down my cup with a bang. It was startling news, if true, but I didn't believe it.

"He's a big stiff," I said aloud. "I'm sure he wouldn't interest a girl like her."

"He's a very fine gentleman," rebuked Higgins. "He is always at the house in town, and he is most liberal I may say."

"Good tipper?"

"He appreciates good service."

"He'd better not try to tip me," I thought furiously.

"His family is as good as any in America, he is rich, and quite a writer. He was a famous athlete at Harvard several years ago. I overheard Mr. Abbott telling Miss Rose he would make her a good husband, only a few days ago."

"Huh! What did she say?"

"You forget yourself, Alden," said Higgins sternly. "I do not repeat the conversation of my employers."

"She will say 'Yes,'" interjected Helma. "She keeps his picture on the bureau in her room."

I regarded the Swedish girl with disfavor. She looked to me at that minute as bovine and nitwitted. Here I had a chance to take Rose boating, and instead I had carried off this empty-headed Scandinavian doll. And now a big pompous rival appeared on the scene. Of course, Rose was probably baiting me in her customary fashion when she suggested my taking her out on the bay, but supposing she had not been, what an idiot I had been not to forget about Helma and agree to her suggestion!

I was in a fine position now, with a servant's livery on my back, to compete for favor against a creature of the type of Anderson, a writer, forsooth, and rich, and a famous Harvard athlete. He wasn't so famous. I remembered they had taken him out of the Yale game before the end of the first half because the Yale backs were holding a parade through his position, and he didn't get in the game again. Where did he get off as a famous football player alongside Alden, the All-America end and captain of the present team?

It didn't seem to me that Rose could be in love with him, else she wouldn't have been so interested in picking on me. A girl doesn't pick on a man who doesn't attract her; she ignores him. Of course the fellow was big and good-looking enough, and in her set, and probably her parents would urge the match. Besides, he was going to be with her for a week or two, privileged to sit by her side while I dined in the servants' hall, able to golf and swim and boat and ride with her. Suppose I had to drive the car while the big mutt sat in the back seat and made love to her!

The very next morning I had the privilege of driving them to the golf club. The fellow had on a suit of clothes that Leon Errol might have worn in a comic opera, but he was big enough to carry it off. Rose was evidently enjoying his company, laughing as they came down the steps. She ignored me

completely when I touched my hat, but said curtly when they were settled in the tonneau:

"Golf club."

They resumed their conversation, and I listened; I couldn't help it. Besides, the subject interested me, for they were talking of nothing but the Yale game of the previous fall.

"It broke my heart to miss it," Rose said. "At the last minute mother was taken sick, and I had to give up the trip."

"It was the most spectacular game I ever saw," he declared. "If ever a team looked beaten, it was Harvard until they brought Alden into the game. Of course, the fellow was covered with horseshoes. Nobody can catch a forward pass forty yards long unless he is the luckiest stiff alive, and, to prove it was luck, he missed a second one later in the game."

Sitting in livery, driving the car, I heard the man belittle my great play. He did not know that Stephens and myself had practiced that very pass at least five hundred times and I was catching nine out of ten of them.

"The reason that he was able to make his runs around the end was that Yale did not know he was fast, and Harvard had never used fake kicks for end runs since the days of Mahan. Naturally their ends were caught napping."

"I read in the papers that he was so fast he could get around any end in the world."

"You'll see the tackles bring him down next year, for Yale will have her defense ready for him. He's a pretty fast man, but he is vastly overrated and after all his reputation was made on fifteen minutes' work."

"And two solid years of preparation, you big mutt!" I said under my breath.

"You act as if you were sorry Harvard won," pouted Rose. "I wept for joy and I kissed Alden's picture in the Sunday paper."

I pricked up my ears at this. Imagine her kissing my picture and then not knowing the original. Of course snapshots of a man in football uniform don't look like much of anything, and it would never occur to her to connect that Alden with the chauffeur driving her own car.

"On the contrary, I was delighted," declared Anderson. "I celebrated that night like a fool, but I may be considered to have a pretty good knowledge of the game, and naturally I am looking at it from the standpoint of an expert."

The fellow was right enough, I had to admit it to myself. Half my success was the total unexpectedness of the attack built up by the coach in secret, but it wasn't human to enjoy being picked to pieces in front of Rose Abbott by a rotten football player like Anderson, through whom Yale had made two touchdowns.

I expect the back of my neck was brick red by the time we got to the golf club. I opened the door, lifted out Rose's golf bag, and then the big tramp threw his bag of sticks at me, and I had to carry both bags up the hill to the clubhouse while he continued to reflect upon my record as a football player.

I supposed he had Rose kidded into believing that he was the greatest guard of all time, when he hadn't even been mentioned for the second team of any All-America selection, the year he graduated.

Rose didn't have a word for me for several days, though I taxied her guests and herself all over the territory. I sat on the beach and watched them in swimming. I saw them playing tennis. I could see the ex-guard showing her how to hold her driver at the tenth tee, which was not far from where the chauffeurs hung out at the golf club.

I smoked a cigarette in the doorway of the garage in the evening, and saw her white dress and his white shirt front moving up and down in the garden. Through the windows of the house I often saw her dancing with him to the music of the radio in the drawing-room, and I went almost wild with jealousy.

Helma came creeping around, presuming on the fact that I had taken her out once, and suggesting walks and rides and swims in the moonlight, but in the frame of mind that I happened to be in she didn't have any luck. I should be holding hands with a blond parlormaid while that overbearing four-flusher was making good with the only girl in the world worth while!

It was a bad sign that she didn't torment me any more. I longed to hear her say "Jeeves," just to show she still liked to mock me, but she had adopted the family practice of calling me William.

One particular night Helma seated herself beside me on the bench in front of the garage. We could see Anderson dancing with Rose while a jazz band in New York sounded as enticing, through the loud speaker on the radio, as though it were actually in the ballroom.

Helma saw that my eyes were on the couple, and she nodded her head solemnly.

"You do not like that Mr. Anderson, William."

"I'm not crazy about him."

"Me, I don't like him either. He is fresh."

"What are you talking about? He's in love with Miss Abbott."

"He may love her, but he can see other pretty girls. He likes me."

"You hate yourself, don't you?"

"I know. He looks at me when I am in the room. He tried to hold my hand when I brushed his coat for him the other day. He said he liked blondes. I think he would like to kiss me."

"You'd probably be glad to be kissed by a fine, handsome gentleman like Anderson," I said with sarcasm which I didn't think she would get.

"No," replied Helma. "Men like that don't mean well by parlormaids. And no man kisses me if I do not like him to. Anderson is a gentleman with ladies, but with servant girls he would be fresh. So."

"You're right. I don't know anything about him, but I think he's a rotter."

"People should keep in their own class," she said. "Now, William, I would not mind taking a walk down to the beach with you. You are a chauffeur. I am a parlormaid. It is quite proper."

"Some other night, Helma," I said, with my eyes glued to the dancers. There were three or four couples moving about, but I followed only one.

"I do not object to kisses in proper circumstances," she said suggestively.

"Maybe Higgins would like to walk on the beach."

"Bah," said Helma, who rose from her seat and stood in front of me. I got up instinctively, but did not turn to look at her. "You, William, are a fool."

"Hey? What's that?"

"From the day you come, you seem to think the servants are not good enough for you. Who are you to be superior? The chauffeur! Whatever you thought of yourself before you became a chauffeur is nothing, because now you are a servant like us. In Sweden my people are well bred; I would not be a servant in Sweden, but in this country I earn much more money and live better than if I was a working girl in a store. I save my money. Some day I shall not be a servant. You think, perhaps, that Miss Rose will like you. I see you watching her. She is a real lady, and to her a chauffeur is nothing but a menial, like a parlormaid. That's why I say you're a fool."

"I beg your pardon, Helma," I told her rather humbly. "You are very sensible, and what you say is quite right. But I am not fool enough to think Miss Rose will overlook the fact that I am her chauffeur. I know my place all right, and I don't consider myself any better than you are. You are a darn pretty, ladylike girl, and it is easy to see you are well bred. When you quit being a servant, you will be a lady, and no one can gainsay you. It's only ignorant ill-bred servants who can't become something better in this country. I'm not a bit better than you are, and I don't feel superior to you. But I am a lot better than that cockney bootlicker Higgins, and those other feather-headed maids, and I wouldn't associate with them, even if I have the same status here that they do."

"Fine," said Helma. "We shall walk on the beach, yes?"

"All right," I agreed. So I walked on the beach with her and sat down and looked at the moon while she told me stories of her life in Stockholm. Then we went into the village and I bought her an ice cream soda. I didn't make love to her, and she didn't seem to expect it. When I took her home I agreed to escort her to a dance in the next village the following night. It was a public dance in a big pavilion which was frequent-

ed by the villagers and the servants of the summer residents.

You see Helma's straight-from-the-shoulder argument had a lot of weight, and I was young enough to get some pleasure from a pretty girl who liked me, since I couldn't spend my time with the girl I really admired. Still, this taking her to a public dance was sort of a formal admission I was keeping company with her, and I didn't cotton to the idea very strongly after I had made the break of issuing the invitation for which she was frankly fishing.

Nothing happened the next day to interfere with my date. I hoped some evening demand would be made upon my services to give me an excuse for breaking it, but it happened that Rose had caught a cold from loafing too long on the raft at the beach the day before, and, that night, went to bed early, leaving her young guests to their own devices.

Helma turned up about nine o'clock and I walked down to the village with her, hired a Ford and trundled her over to Brownville. There is something about a cheap dance hall which is always repugnant to me. A certain class of girls look very well in ordinary clothes but when the poor things try to dress up, their means are so limited and their taste is so bad that the results they achieve are pretty awful. And the boys who go with them are worse than the girls. In some way girls learn something of manners, but the young men are rude and rough, and their efforts to spruce up for a party are pathetic.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANDERSON TAKES A BATH.

THE better class of village folks kept away from the Brownville pavilion, but there were a number of young fellows and a few girls I knew from former years, and I introduced Helma so that she should have other partners, and danced with one or two of these girls myself.

Helma had good taste and her simple little dresses set off her sweet blond prettiness so that she stood out as the belle of the gathering. The music was good, the floor in

fine shape, the sides of the hall were open to the air, and there were broad porches and a garden around the place with secluded nooks which appealed to sentimental couples. There was also a big soda fountain at one side with a lot of little tables.

You couldn't blame these folks if they aped the crowd at the country club and the various golf clubs, and were not content with the innocent drinks served by the management. I saw a lot of flasks being pulled out of hip pockets. I saw girls sipping from bottles and flasks as I moved about the place, and, as the evening wore on, there was quite a little alcoholic gaiety.

I had turned Helma over to a chap I knew and was dancing with his girl, when I was surprised to observe, standing in the entrance, Mr. G. Burton Anderson and young Harry Frazer. They had slipped away from Abbott's, having heard about this dance, and came over to see the fun. I paid them no more attention until the dance was over, and was returning to the spot where I had parked Helma when I saw Anderson sitting beside her. Not wishing to encounter the fellow I turned away and, a moment later, when the music struck up, I saw him lead her out on the floor.

Not being encumbered by a partner, I strolled out of the hall and walked down the steps into the garden. Presently I found a bench, facing a pretty little pond, and dropped upon it, lighted a cigarette and lost myself in foolish reverie. In four or five minutes the music ceased, which did not recall me to myself and I sat on, enjoying the peace of the place.

A couple had occupied a bench not far away—nothing to me; but suddenly I was brought to my senses by hearing Helma saying:

"No, indeed, Mr. Anderson. No, sir, please."

So the fellow had induced her to stroll out into the grounds with him. Despite her expressed dislike of him, the distinction of dancing with a distinguished guest of the Abbott's had appealed to her, and now she was permitting him to become familiar. Of course she said no, but what's a girl's "No" to a man who wants a kiss?

"Come on, kid. You're a pretty little

thing. Just a sip of whisky won't hurt you."

"I do not drink, Mr. Anderson. Please don't try to make me."

"Here you are. Open your mouth."

"No, no, no." There was alarm in her last "no." I was in a queer position. I was the chauffeur, he was a guest. The girl had accompanied him voluntarily. It was none of my business, really. But on the other hand I had escorted her, she was under my protection and I had not been on the job. Besides he was forcibly trying to make her drink liquor against her will. I didn't like him anyway. Well, let's see what he was up to.

I rose, walked around a group of willows, and came into full view of them. The fellow had the girl's arms fastened to her side with one arm and was holding a flask to her lips, trying to jam the mouth of the flask between her teeth. She was struggling furiously but saying no more, because if she opened her mouth the hot whisky would trickle down her throat.

In two strides I reached them and knocked the flask flying into the bushes. Anderson dropped the girl and turned to face me.

"I think that is the filthiest low-down trick I ever saw a person who calls himself a gentleman attempt," I informed him.

"Why, damn you!" he retorted angrily. "Who the deuce are you?"

"I brought that young lady to the dance and if you don't get out of here I'll break your neck."

"It's the chauffeur," he said in surprise.

"Of course. The chauffeur would escort the parlormaid. I happen to be your master's guest, young fellow, so you better watch your step."

"Let go of that girl, and make tracks while you are safe."

"Ha," he laughed. "I'll show you what I think of your threats."

Still holding Helma he caught her chin in his free hand and forcibly kissed her on the mouth while she uttered a squeal of protest. At the same instant I grasped him by the collar with my right hand, dragged him away from her so forcibly that Helma fell on her knees when he released her. Then I

swung him around and gave him a kick with a right foot which could send a football high and far.

A chauffeur can't kick his master's guest and get away with it. Undoubtedly Anderson would have considered it disgraceful to fight with a servant but he couldn't fail to resent that kick, which was why I had resorted to it.

He stumbled forward several feet, then turned and, with a bellow, came for me.

I was nearly as tall as Anderson but he was twenty pounds heavier. He had been a guard and was a big strong fellow and I soon found out that he was a boxer. I learned, afterward, that he had quite a reputation among amateurs in New York. On the other hand I was in good condition, my experiences pulling a dory on the Grand Banks had developed my arms and back so that I was very powerful, and I was animated by a hatred of the fellow of which he was not aware.

I had never done any fighting, and did not know the science of boxing. I ducked a straight left that he shot at me and stepped into a right which doubled me up. He followed with a left upper cut which sent me backward and a right swing knocked me off my pins. He was waiting for me to get up, and a right to the side of my head sent me down again.

Evidently I was in for a beating, since I couldn't use my hands against a skilled ring performer, but we happened to be having a blood fight in private and I saw no reason why I should follow rules made for him. The force of his blows had knocked me down twice, but I wasn't in the least injured or even dazed. He stood poised about three feet away, waiting for me to stand up and get knocked down again. I crouched, appeared to be about to rise, and suddenly launched myself at his knees. It was a sure hard tackle and brought him to the ground with a bang. Holding him in my arms, I rolled over on him and then we indulged in a rough and tumble on the ground, during which I landed several sledge hammer blows on his face and body which took a lot of pep out of him.

Helma stood watching the fight with a white face but made no sound. She was a

Viking's daughter and probably enjoyed the spectacle.

Somehow Anderson wriggled away from me and scrambled to his feet. Having been tackled once, he approached warily, while I stood waiting for him. He launched a left jab and I knew a right to the body would follow. I took the jab which stung me in the jaw, caught his right arm as he buried it almost to the elbow in my stomach, then bent over and wrapped both my arms about his middle. He beat a tattoo of rabbit punches on the back of my neck, but I lifted him high in the air; my arms and back had no trouble with his two hundred pounds. I was only ten feet from the edge of the pond. I ran to it, narrowly escaping serious injury from his kicks, and hurled him into the water. He struck with a terrific splash about five or six feet from shore. Instantly I took Helma by the arm and hastened with her to the pavilion.

The fellow crawled out of the water, bedraggled and sputtering, the fight out of him for the moment at least, and by the time he was ready to resume, we had re-entered the hall. I knew he wouldn't follow us in the watersoaked condition he was in and the outcome of the fray amused me tremendously.

Helma was in an agony of fear.

"You will be discharged," she said. "It is wonderful of you to fight for me and I am very grateful, but we will both lose our jobs, see if we don't."

"I should worry," I told her. "They can discharge me any time they like. I'm sick of being a chauffeur, but you are perfectly safe. You don't suppose Anderson is going to admit to the Abbotts that he went to a servant's dance, got fresh with their parlormaid and got thrown into a horsepond by their chauffeur. He'll try to get even with me somehow, but he won't dare peep about you. How do I look? Am I all bunged up?"

"You are not bleeding, but you have some cuts on your cheek, and your collar is torn and your clothes are dirty. We shall go home at once."

"Suits me," I grinned. "I don't like dancing anyway."

Helma continued to bewail our bad for-

tune as we started away in the Ford and I was a bit impatient with her for I was delighted at the treatment I had meted out to Anderson to the extent of being willing to barter the job for the privilege of ruffling him up and ducking him in a dirty little pond like a hound puppy. It was too bad there hadn't been a stone around his neck.

"If you hadn't been idiot enough to go walking with him, it wouldn't have happened," I told her bluntly. "I suppose you had to dance with him if he asked you, but that didn't imply sitting on a bench in the dark and spooning."

"I was not spooning," she said spiritedly. "He was very nice and a gentleman while we danced, a wonderful dancer too. When he proposed to get a breath of fresh air I didn't think anything about it. Then we sat on the bench just for a moment. He tried to kiss me but I would not let him. It was after that he pulled out the flask, took a big drink and tried to make me take one. He was a brute but just the same we shall lose our positions, so."

"There are lots of jobs. You should worry. Did you see me lift him up in the air and throw him into the middle of the pond?"

"How strong you are!" admired Helma, leaning her cheek against my strong shoulders. I wished Rose Abbott could have seen me toss her gentleman friend, but rather than have no audience, I was willing to be admired by Helma.

"Don't you say anything about this?" I cautioned her, when we reached the house. "The chances are he will be ashamed to tell about it. I bet he doesn't even tell that chap who was with him in the hall how it happened or who did it."

"And we shall go dancing again, yes?" said Helma.

"We shall go dancing again, no," I retorted. "Look at the mess we got into to-night."

Helma sniffed and then ran into the house. I took the car to the garage in the village and walked back to my quarters. It was fortunate I hadn't sneaked one of the family cars for my jaunt to Brownville since that would have given Anderson something to report.

Just as I was entering the garage, I heard a motor coming up the drive, so I ran upstairs to my living quarters in order that I might not meet my victim who was probably arriving. He had taken out the run-about, of course with permission; ran it into the car house and went about his business. I decided to go to bed.

It was then that an alarming phase of the situation occurred to me, the danger of his making Rose fall in love with him. The man was absolutely no good, a bounder, a rotter. To take advantage of his position in the house as he had done when he tried to make poor little Helma, impressed as she was by his importance as a guest, drink out of his flask against her will, was the sort of thing that no man with a vestige of decency would do.

I didn't care what his social position or his wealth or his influence might be, he wasn't fit to marry a respectable girl, so it was up to me to see that he didn't do any such thing—a tall order. While I was thinking of ways and means I dropped into unconsciousness, and the next thing I knew the alarm clock was announcing stridently that it was seven thirty, getting up time.

When I ran downstairs and out of the garage I was surprised and pleased to see G. Burton Anderson, in a golfing suit, smoking a cigarette, sitting on a wooden horse which stood against the building, and waiting for me.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MORNING AFTER.

ANY time you can make a person, with whom you must have a reckoning, come to you, instead of his forcing you to go to him, you may know you have the stronger position. That is why I was pleased to see him. It meant that he hadn't told about my assault upon him; that he was anxious to keep me from talking to any one about it.

I looked him over coldly from the doorway, waiting for him to speak. He gazed at me, and I saw him redden with anger. Finally he spoke first.

"I want to talk to you, young man."

"Yes?"

"If I wasn't a darn good sport I would have you fired out of here neck and crop."

"You don't look like a good sport to me, just the same."

"That was a dirty trick you played on me last night. I was fighting fairly, observing the rules, standing off to give you time to get on your feet when you made that dive tackle and knocked me over."

"If I had been in a ring I would observe ring rules, but I was protecting a girl against a man who weighs twenty pounds more than I do, and knows how to box, which I don't."

"If I have to fight with you again, I'll show you what I know about street fighting."

"And I'll use a baseball bat, or an ax or a cobblestone which ever is handiest, anytime a bigger man than I am attacks me."

"What I came here to say, young man," said Anderson, rather placatingly. "Is that you totally misunderstood the affair between that servant girl and myself?"

"Indeed. What were you doing with a servant girl?"

"We were out for a lark, and the girl was pretty, and I had had too much to drink. If you are in love with the little Swede I'm sorry I bit in. You seemed to think I was forcing her to take a drink. She was willing enough."

I walked up to Anderson who stood up as I approached, fearing my intention, perhaps, and permitted him to see what a look of contempt was.

"I thought you were a dirty rat last night, but after that crack I apologize to the rat."

"Why damn you," he exclaimed, and took a step forward. I drew off with a wary eye for his left lead, but he let his hand drop to his side.

"I can't strike a servant, certainly not on the Abbotts' grounds but if you'll walk down to the beach and put up your hands I'll give you the beating of your life for that insult."

This made me laugh in his face. I had no intention of going down on the beach and letting this fellow, with his boxing

knowledge, cut me to ribbons. I had been lucky, last night, in getting under his guard and giving him a toss, but he would see I didn't do that again.

"My duties as chauffeur do not allow me to fight with the guests."

He gnawed his under lip with rage, then threatened viciously:

"I'll get you where you can't get away, you sneaking coward, and if you breathe a word of what happened last night I'll have Abbott fire you and I'll see that you never get another job."

"Bunk."

"You'll see if it's bunk. I came down here to explain things, to slip you a ten-dollar bill, and tell you I wouldn't hold the dirty trick you played on me against you, which is damn decent for a guest to his host's chauffeur."

"Why, are you afraid I'll say something about it?"

"None of your business."

"You better see Helma and slip her your dirty money if she'll take it. I wouldn't be surprised if she had told Miss Abbott all about it by this time."

"She wouldn't dare, but you would. Who are you anyway? You're no regular chauffeur. More likely a burglar or a yegg, here to rob the place. I'll warn Mr. Abbott."

"Go to it," I sneered. "It happens I was born and brought up in these parts and the whole town knows all about me."

"Bah, you damn flunkey," he gritted.

I turned my back on him and walked to the servants' dining room where breakfast was waiting.

Helma sidled up alongside of me and asked breathlessly:

"Has he told yet?"

"On the contrary he was hanging around waiting for me to come out of the garage so he could bribe me to keep my mouth shut."

"How much did he give you?"

I looked at her commiseratingly. Evidently she had the soul of a menial to suppose I would take money from the man.

"I told him to give his money to you since you were the person insulted. Would you take it?"

"Sure," she said with a smile. "I take all the money I get and put it in the bank. This man can lose me my job which is bad. Instead he is sorry and gives me money which is good. You are a fool."

"It's all in the point of view," I laughed, as I reached for a second helping of fried ham.

There was another interviewer waiting for me when I left the dining room to return to the garage. Rose Abbott was in the flower garden along the edge of which I had to pass, and she called to me as I went by her.

"Morning, Jeeves. Would you mind pulling down this bush so I can cut off that big rose at the top?"

I went to her side to perform the service which gave her an opportunity to look me over. I had two nasty cuts on my cheek, a blue spot under my left eye, and one or two other evidences of the fracas of the night before. Anderson, confound him hadn't a mark because I was not able to lay my fist on him save when we were rolling on the ground and even then I had not damaged his face.

"We do not allow our servants to fight, Jeeves," said Rose quietly.

I colored furiously but made no reply.

"Who were you fighting with?"

"What I do on my time off is my affair, Miss Abbott."

"Yes, but this disreputable appearance is being worn on working time. We like our servants to be free from black eyes and cuts and bruises."

"Yes, miss."

"Did you win the fight?"

I grinned a little. "I rather think I did."

"Where did it take place?"

"Over at Brownville Pavilion."

"That rowdy dance hall. I am surprised, Jeeves, that you should go to such a place."

"I won't go again," I promised.

"I suppose you took Helma with you."

"Is it fair to quiz me like this?" I demanded.

"Probably not. Did you have Helma with you?"

"I have nothing to say."

"I'll find out from Helma."

"Please, Miss Abbott, let the matter drop. I just punished a rowdy and that's all there is to the affair."

"How do you like Mr. Anderson?"

"I think he is a big stiff."

"He doesn't admire you, either. He told father a little while ago that you looked to him like a criminal."

"He's entitled to his opinion."

Rose looked at me with a quizzical expression and half-closed eyes.

"In view of your appearance, your opinion of him and what he thinks about you, I wonder if your fight happened to be with Mr. Anderson."

I had no intention of telling on Anderson, and this shrewd girl was shooting pretty near the mark. I made no reply.

"It couldn't be possible, because you look as if you had been beaten up and he hasn't got a mark on him. You told me you won the fight, I believe."

"I didn't tell you anything that I could avoid and I'm not going to say any more except that I won a fight last night."

"Well, I consider your conduct most reprehensible, and I am sure my father will not wish to have prize fighters in his employ."

"I suggest you tell him all about it. I don't like this job."

"So you've said on numerous occasions. If you keep it up I'll begin to believe you. Here comes Mr. Anderson now, so you can trot along to your garage."

Anderson was coming towards us with haste and apprehension, probably afraid that I had told Rose about our encounter of the night before. Although there was no reason why I should not have exposed him, and if I had been a faithful servant it would have been my duty to have done so, in my own mind I considered myself his rival and it didn't seem exactly the proper thing for one rival to carry tales about another. Besides it didn't look as though I needed to inform her; in some curious way she seemed to have gleaned all but the details of the affair. I would have liked to have been present during their conversation, but, that being impossible I had to content myself with watching them from my seat outside the garage.

Rose received him with a pleasant smile; he seemed reassured, and they talked in a very amiable manner. Presently they strolled back toward the house, out of my sight.

I couldn't understand Rose's attitude toward me. Although I had never employed any servants, I had read a lot of fiction, and never did a heroine treat a chauffeur exactly as she was treating me. Of course some silly feather-headed flapper without real taste and breeding might fall in love and elope with a chauffeur; I had read of a number of such affairs in the newspapers, but thoroughbreds like Rose Abbott know better. And Rose was nearly as old as myself, twenty-three at least; she wasn't likely to be impressed by the kind of man who would take a job driving her father's car.

Since she didn't like me in that way, why should she persist in behaving to me in that half mocking, half kindly manner; why did she engage me in long conversations; why did she not wax indignant if she really suspected me of engaging in a fist fight with her favorite guest?

Of course she knew that I came of a good old New England family, and I had once saved her from drowning, but even these things did not justify her familiarity with me on occasion and her insolence at other times.

As far as G. Burton Anderson was concerned, it didn't seem to me that she could be in love with him; a girl as keen as she, must have seen through the fellow's veneer and discovered his contemptible character long before. Perhaps her father insisted upon her being nice to him. I knew from Higgins, that the old man favored an engagement. Confound the butler, why hadn't he told me what Rose replied since he had gone so far as to repeat one side of the conversation.

I wasn't afraid of Anderson trying to do me further mischief. He knew he had disgraced himself already by fighting with a chauffeur and all that he wanted was to have the affair forgotten as quickly as possible.

I yearned to get out of livery. I had repeatedly dared Rose to discharge me, yet

I didn't have courage enough to make the break myself. To leave the Abbotts' service meant walking out of sight of Rose. I might return to my shack and loaf about on the outskirts of the estate hoping to see her now and then, but an ex-chauffeur had no more social standing than a chauffeur and I wouldn't be any better off that way than I was at present.

I could leave Hydeport, take another fishing cruise or return to Boston to take a flier in the real estate business, which meant that I would not see her at all. While I was gone she might permit herself to get engaged to Anderson, and that I had to stop somehow.

If I could only find out something more about the fellow, something really reprehensible so that I could confront him with my knowledge and scare him away. After all I had only the butler's say so, and the fact that he seemed acceptable to Mr. Abbott, to indicate that he was rich and well connected.

How could I get information about him? In seeking ways and means I thought of Tom Gifford, one of our assistant coaches, who was a prominent lawyer in New York, and who had been very friendly with me during the football season. He might be able to get a line on Anderson; he could do it if anybody could. Accordingly I sat myself down and penned him a missive immediately, offering to defray the cost of any investigation he might make, rather a tall order for I had, to my name, only a few hundred dollars.

The letter had hardly been written and addressed when I was summoned to the house to take Mr. Abbott and Ambrose Buffington for a drive.

I took the big touring car to the door, whereupon Rose, Anderson and the two young girls descended upon it.

"Pardon, Miss Abbott, your father ordered this car for himself and Mr. Buffington."

"All right, Jeeves," she said cheerfully. "We'll pile into the runabout. I'll drive myself."

The two men came out, climbed into the back seat and Abbott directed me to drive to the south of the village. I did not drive

rapidly and it was not remarkable that I could hear the conversation in the back seat.

"There is only one possible location," Abbott was saying. "The point juts out into the bay an eighth of a mile and curves around. It provides a perfect little harbor inside and a white sand beach with a pretty good surf for bathing on the outer side. There is always a breeze blowing across the point and there is plenty of room for buildings. To my mind it is the most ideal location for a modern summer hotel on the whole Cape."

"Let's have a look," said Buffington briefly.

Then Abbott began to enlarge upon the advantages of a hotel in Hydeport, how the place was growing, how the summer residents would utilize it, the fact that golf and tennis and country clubs were already in existence, when most summer hotels required the laying out of such grounds and institutions before they could offer guests the attractions required by modern vacationists.

I heard what they said, listened without shame since they made no effort to lower their voices, apparently because they regarded me as a robot in livery.

Presently they came to the spot in question, and, as there was no road down the point, got out of the car to continue on foot.

"There is a house on the point," said Buffington.

"It's nothing but a shack, deserted most of the time. We can pick it up for a song," I heard my employer say.

Now the interesting thing about this to me was that they were talking about my house. It happened that my father had owned most of that point, and it now belonged to me. Up to the present it had been a very unprofitable heritage. As the development of Hydeport had been almost entirely to the north of the village, I had never had an offer for the land during the four years that it had been my property.

Because these two financiers supposed that a servant could not have any intelligence, they had exposed their entire scheme to me and when they came to buy the

property I would be in full possession of the facts.

Had I been approached by a real estate man I might have sold the entire point for a couple of thousand dollars. Because of their carelessness it was going to cost them at least \$25,000. I grinned as I thought of Abbott's rage when he found that his own chauffeur was the owner of the site for the hotel, and proposed to make him pay through the nose for it.

CHAPTER X.

A REAL ESTATE COUP.

I KNEW that these men were not planning a two or three story rookery of the type of the Cape hotels that were erected thirty or forty years ago and are still in existence, most of them earning each season their original cost. They had in mind a splendid affair something like the Ocean House at Swampscott or the Griswold at New London.

Neither of them would bother to promote an enterprise costing less than half a million. The question was how much would they stand in the way of a hold-up? If I asked too much they might pass up this location in favor of another. But let the word get out that a big hotel project was being undertaken, and the price of all the waterfront land within ten miles would go sky high.

I saw the pair walking around, and pointing. I saw them try the door of the shack, find it locked, peer through the window. It tempted me to call to them that the key of the place was in my pocket.

Presently they sauntered back to the car, climbed in, nodded to me to turn homeward and in a very short time I drew up to the door of the Abbott home. They said nothing on the homeward drive. My hopes which had risen so high gradually deflated. Perhaps Buffington had not been impressed; my prospect of making a killing might not be so good after all.

I drove up to the garage and ran the car inside. Then I took advantage of an apparent lack of demand for my services to hasten to the village. There were about

four acres on the Point which did not belong to me. They were the property of Neil Rowe who ran a fish store near the dock. Rowe lived in the village, his family had never had a house on the Point. The land had come to him from an uncle of his wife some thirty years before. That he would sell was certain and he would sell to me cheaper than to anybody else since my land was contiguous, and he knew I would not pay much for his.

On the other hand I did not want to cheat Rowe. He was a decent old fellow whom I had known all my life, and if there was to be prosperity he was entitled to his share of it. It seemed to me that the best thing to do was to take him into partnership, particularly since I didn't have money enough to buy much real estate.

"Neil," I demanded. "How much will you take for your land on the Point?"

"Well I don't know. I hadn't thought of selling."

"You'd take five hundred dollars for the four acres quick enough."

"I don't know about that," he said with Yankee caution. "I calculate to hold on to that land; it may be valuable some day."

"You know it's no good. You can't grow anything there."

"Well, some of these summer folks might get a notion to build a cottage there and give me a good price."

"Here's the idea: there may be a chance to sell the whole point for a good price. I know about it and you don't. Suppose you give me the right to sell your land for the same price per acre I get for mine."

"Something doing?" he asked eagerly. "You sure they want the whole point?"

"I promise you not to sell my land unless yours goes along with it. The whole parcel or nothing."

"Yes, but a feller might come along that didn't want the whole point and wanted my four acres. Then where would I be if I had yours tied up with mine."

"Nobody has come along in twenty years, has there?"

"No."

"And nobody will. I think I can get you a big profit."

"Well," he said hesitatingly. "You

been an honest young feller, though you ain't been in Hydepore much lately and no knowing what tricks you might have picked up. Still, I knew your daddy and I know your stock. I'll go in with you William."

I got paper and ink and drew up an agreement; my real estate experience told me how to word it. Neil shook his head as he read it but finally sighed. I signed under his name, made a copy of the agreement which we both signed, and I controlled the whole point without spending a cent.

In an hour I was back at Abbott's ready to do business when called upon.

I did not have to wait long, for Abbott had phoned to the real estate dealer in town to ask the owner of the Point. Sears, the real estate man said in surprise:

"Why Mr. Abbott, that point is owned by William Alden who is driving your automobile for you, all except a corner that belongs to Neil Rowe, who runs the fish market."

A curt order to come to the house brought me running. Sitting on the broad porch were the two business men who both looked at me sourly. Undoubtedly they had remembered that they had talked about their project during the drive and I had seen them walking about my property and poking around my house.

"You sent for me, sir?" I asked politely.

"Yes," said Abbott, with false geniality. "I did not know I had a land owner in my employ."

"I don't understand, sir."

"I'm informed you own that point of land we visited today."

"Oh, that land."

"Why didn't you tell me it was your property?"

"You didn't mention it to me, sir."

"What did you think when you saw us inspecting it?"

"I thought you were going for a stroll."

"Hum. Want to sell it?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"It has been in my family for two hundred years. I couldn't part with it."

"The family pride of a chauffeur," sneered Buffington.

"That's nonsense," said Abbott. "The place is no good. What'll you take for it?"

"What do you want it for, may I ask, sir?"

"None of your darn business," thundered Buffington.

"I don't want to sell," I said looking at the big man defiantly.

"I told you," said Buffington. "The hound was eavesdropping."

"Do I have to stand for this, sir?" I demanded of Abbott.

"No, certainly not," he asserted. "Did you happen to overhear our conversation in the car going down?"

"I caught a word now and then."

"You heard, all right," he said in a disappointed tone. "Now what do you ask for your land?"

"I control the entire Point sir. I'll sell it for twenty-five thousand dollars."

"What?" shouted Abbott. "You've gone crazy. The land is worth about three thousand dollars at most. How do you happen to control the Point?"

"Mr. Rowe and myself felt that some day a hotel would go up and it would be better not to sell any part of the Point, but to keep it intact."

"You lose, you smart Yankees," roared Buffington. "I wouldn't build a hotel on that point now if you gave it to me."

"You are in my employ," said Abbott, disregarding his friend. "Do you think it is honorable to take advantage of a conversation not intended for your ears, to hold up your employer?"

"I didn't eavesdrop, Mr. Abbott. You talked in loud, clear tones, knowing I was sitting three feet in front of you. You were planning to take advantage of the owner of that property by picking up his land for a song. It happened that it is my land, and I won't sell it for a song."

"We don't have to build on that point," said Buffington nastily. "As far as I'm concerned, the entire project is dropped."

"Yes, sir," I said meekly. "Anything more, sir?"

"I guess not," Abbott replied. "Wait a minute. When did you and Rowe make this engagement about selling the Point as a unit?"

"About an hour ago."

"Well, I'll be damned," exclaimed Abbott, while Buffington banged his fist on the table and scowled at me. "You hot-footed it down there and tied up the other owner."

"Yes, sir."

"You are fired."

I dropped the mask of inferiority which I had been maintaining with difficulty.

"All right," I said familiarly. "Since I am no longer in your employ, the price which I fixed very low as an accommodation, goes up to thirty thousand dollars. I may add that I don't care whether you buy the land or not. I'm not depending upon it, and I don't think the natives of Hydeport would wish a hotel in town anyway."

"You get out of here as fast as your legs will carry you," bellowed Abbott. "You eat my bread and take my wages and trim me under my very nose."

"Wait a minute," called Buffington. "Suppose we offer you fifteen thousand dollars for that property, cash in hand?"

"Nothing doing."

"I am inclined to think I can prosecute you for making use of information obtained in my employ," warned Abbott.

"Supposing you try that," I said warmly. "Just for the threat my price is thirty-five thousand dollars."

"For God's sake, let him go, or he will be asking fifty thousand," groaned Buffington. "He's the cheekiest chauffeur I ever saw in my life."

"You gentlemen can blame yourselves, and nobody else," I assured them. "Simply because a man wears livery, he doesn't lose his intelligence, and if you conspire to beat a third person out of a fair price for his property be careful not to conspire in his presence."

"We were a couple of darn fools," said Abbott ruefully. "But who would have supposed a servant was the owner of the land we wanted to buy. Well, listen to reason, Alden. Suppose we pay you twenty thousand dollars for your twenty-five acres of land?"

"My reasonable price is twenty-five thousand dollars, take it or leave it."

"Closed," exclaimed Buffington.

"Wait a minute," demanded Abbott.

"What's the use? The fellow has had time to be coached by some shyster lawyer, and we can't hold up a profitable deal for a few thousand dollars. If I ever open my mouth again except in a sound-proof room I hope I get lockjaw."

"All right," agreed Abbott. "You get your blood money, young fellow. And after all, you're a good chauffeur. I won't fire you."

"Too late," I grinned. "I have retired from the chauffeur business."

"You ought to have better sense than to hire a fellow like this for a chauffeur," declared Buffington, who became good-natured when the deal was closed. "Bone-headed servants are a nuisance, but intelligent ones are a menace; they are either crooks who get into your service to rob your house, or schemers who are seeking information. We want immediate possession of that point, young man."

I drew out my key and laid it on the table. "Here's the key of the house. There is no fence around the land. I'll get my possessions out to-night."

"We'll have Gloster draw up the papers and investigate the titles," said Abbott. "Are you so high-toned you are quitting immediately, Alden, or will you work till I can get another chauffeur?"

"I'll stick on the job until you can hire some one else, sir."

"All right. To-morrow you can sign the bill of sale and get your check. I suppose you think you've pulled off a smart trick, but you don't deserve any credit. We talked too much, and we are paying for it."

"Yes, sir."

I retired, walking on air. My share of the purchase money would be twenty thousand dollars. That may not sound like a large sum, but the most I had ever owned at any one time was the six hundred dollars I had earned fishing on the Grand Banks. With this sum I could put myself through Harvard and set up in the real estate business in Boston.

My experience selling real estate had convinced me that I had more intelligence, ingenuity, and selling ability than most of the people with whom I worked. A good real estate man figures that every thousand

dollars should control ten thousand, and with twenty thousand dollars I could swing a two-hundred-thousand-dollar deal. I knew of a certain apartment house in Cambridge that I could lease with a very little capital and manage with a big return on my investment.

My impulse was to tear the livery off my back and burn it up, but I had promised to remain for a few days. Besides, I had to think of Rose Abbott. What difference was this change in my affairs going to make in my relationship with Rose? When I had left her father's service, what was I going to do? It was no use to hang around Hydeport; the stigma of having been a chauffeur would cling to me. Besides, my home was gone. Well, I might as well wipe the mud off the touring car.

That night I carried a merry laughing party to a dance at the golf club. Anderson sat on the front seat with me, Rose and three young women piled into the tonneau with young Frazer. All the way over the girls chortled and giggled and twisted and squirmed and cast remarks forward to Anderson, who wiggled around in his seat to answer them.

It was a curious sensation to sit next to a man who would have throttled me with the greatest good will in the world, but who was compelled to ignore me because of my livery. I think my presence had some effect upon his enjoyment of the ride. I hope so. I was young and pleasure-loving, would have given worlds to be of that party as well as in it; I told myself that this was probably my last night of service; in the future I would meet such people on equal terms, as I had done during the past year, until I had thrust myself into bondage to be near Rose Abbott.

When we reached the golf club Anderson alighted first to help the girls out of the tonneau. Then he turned to me and, with a contemptuous gesture, handed me a dollar bill. I took it, drew a card of matches from my pocket, lighted the end of the bank note, and used the flaming money to light a cigarette.

I thought the man would strike me, but before he could say anything Rose Abbott, who had turned in time to see the exhibi-

tion, pushed in front of him. Her eyes were blazing, and her indignation was so overpowering that I actually quailed before it.

"You insolent, bad-mannered, ill-bred boor!" she exclaimed. "How dare you insult my guest in my presence? Apologize to Mr. Anderson this instant, and to me."

"Don't mind him, Rose," said Anderson quietly. "Just leave us alone, and I'll take great pleasure in chastising him."

"This is my affair, Burton. Alden, you apologize immediately."

"I am sorry you saw what I did, Miss Abbott," I said. "I meant no disrespect to you."

"That isn't enough. Apologize to Mr. Anderson."

"I'm sorry."

She stamped her foot imperiously, almost compellingly, but I was cub enough to be adamant.

"I won't apologize to him," I muttered.

Then, without warning, and so swiftly that I had no time to realize what was about to happen, she took a step forward, lifted her arm, and slapped me stingingly on the cheek.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSE HUMILIATES ME.

THE blood that sprang to my face came from my heart. I was hurt, bitterly wounded in my pride and my self-respect, in my belief in her, and all my hopes. So, after all, this was how she considered me—a servant, to be pampered or whipped at will.

Rose looked a bit frightened, made as though to say something; but Anderson laughed shortly, took her arm, and led her away.

"Since you prefer to do your own chastising, you do it well," he said.

I was supposed to wait until the dance was over. My first impulse was to abandon the car and leave Hydepore forever. Then my pride assured me that the thing to do was to stick it out until Abbott released me, since my resignation was already in. Besides, I had to close the deal for the land next day.

As far as Rose Abbott was concerned, I renounced her. Under no circumstances would I ever speak to her again. If I had to remain for two or three days longer, I should be a wooden servant. It was true I had done a churlish thing; that I should not have treated Anderson's tip so contemptuously in the presence of his hostess and my mistress; that I should have obeyed her and made some sort of apology to him since she demanded it, but nothing justified her striking me.

What an ungovernable temper she possessed! Who would imagine that such a beautiful and lovely creature could be a termagant? Despite my feelings, I couldn't help admire her beauty in her anger! How dazzlingly she had looked just as her right hand smote me on the jaw.

Apparently she thought an awful lot of G. Burton Anderson, else why had she grown so angry when I slighted him? She had either known or suspected that there was bad blood between us; that we had come to blows. How could she expect me to take a tip from the man?

But she had humiliated and insulted me in front of him, and gone off with him to dance, leaving me alone with my shame and the print of five little fingers on my cheek.

Undoubtedly she would expect that I would leave immediately and would not even wait to bring the party home. I would show that I could be a good servant by turning up at midnight as though nothing had happened. To-morrow I would be a free man, and as far as Rose Abbott was concerned, she would pass out of my life.

Three hours passed miserably while I nursed my wrath to keep it warm. Eventually midnight arrived, and I drove up to the entrance of the club, sitting straight and sullen in my seat.

The party came laughing down the steps; Rose looked a trifle surprised to see me, but said nothing. Again Anderson climbed into the front seat. As the car was moving down the driveway he leaned toward me and whispered tauntingly:

"That squares me for the duck pond incident."

I managed to refrain from making an

answer, but I boiled inwardly like the radiator of a Ford.

When I had unloaded the party at the door of Abbott's, I heaved a sigh of relief. Anderson had the good sense not to try to tip me again. I drove over to the garage, disposed of the car, and climbed, unhappily, to my room.

About half an hour later the telephone downstairs rang, and I answered it.

Helma's voice said:

"Miss Abbott wishes you to come to the house."

I hesitated, but decided to obey orders, and with reluctant feet moved over to the residence. Rose was standing at the top of the steps. She made a gorgeous picture in her evening dress with a red rose in her dark hair, and she was in a serious mood.

"I sent for you, William," she said quietly. "I suppose you are leaving in the morning."

"Yes."

"It was decent of you to wait to bring us home."

"Thank you."

"I'm sorry I struck you."

To this I made no reply. I couldn't.

"I lost my temper because you wouldn't obey me when I made a point of it. You humiliated me in front of my guest. I am ashamed that I struck you. Will you forget it?"

I looked her squarely in the eye. "Never so long as I live."

"Ooh!" she said, her quick temper beginning to rise. "So that's your attitude. I have demeaned myself to apologize and you refuse to accept it."

"You said forget it. It's impossible."

"Then there is nothing to be done about it?"

"Good night, Miss Abbott."

"Good night," she said; and then her tongue, always mocking, got away from her.

"I'll see that you get a good character reference for your next place."

"I'll never again put myself in a position where I can be beaten for refusing to take a tip."

"You know it wasn't that," she exclaimed. "You could have refused the

money. You insulted him and me by burning it."

"I have already been punished for that," I said bitterly. "Good night, Miss Abbott."

"You are impossible," she declared, stamping her foot on the boards, and, turning, she ran into the house.

So ended what I anticipated would be our last interview; but there was another and more bitter one in store for me next day. The new chauffeur arrived in the morning, which I spent showing him his duties. About noon I was summoned to the house, where the real estate transaction was completed in the presence of Gloster, who was Abbott's attorney. At its conclusion they handed me a check for twenty-five thousand dollars, which I folded and placed in my inside pocket. I had resumed my ordinary clothing.

In the hallway I encountered Helma, who barred my passage.

"You are leaving, William?"

"Yes, Helma; I've quit."

"I'm so sorry. You are going to stay in the village—yes?"

"No; I'm going to Boston, I think."

"Oh," she said a little forlornly, "I don't think I shall like the new chauffeur. I am sorry you are going."

"I am sorry not to see you again. Good-by."

"You are not sorry," she said pettishly. "You don't care at all. You take up my time and talk nice things to me, and now you walk off like this."

"I didn't make love to you, and you know it, Helma. We were just good friends, so let it go at that."

"All right," she said, with a smile. "After all, you think too well of yourself."

There was a cluster of guests on the porch when I passed out of the house. Rose detached herself from them and came toward me.

"Alden," she said. "I want to speak to you."

I bowed and waited for her. She led me into a small room opening off the hall, and then turned on me.

"Last night," she said, "I demeaned

myself by apologizing to you for that blow, and you were ungracious enough to refuse to accept it. If I had known then what I know now, I would not have dreamed of excusing myself. The blow was deserved, and you should have had a horsewhipping as well. You are a completely contemptible character, and I hope I never set eyes on you again."

The vehemence with which she spoke and the glitter in her eye convinced me that she meant what she said.

"I'll try to fix it so you won't," I retorted.

"My father told me this morning exactly what you had done. You listened to a conversation between himself and another guest, took advantage of it to hold him up for twenty-five thousand dollars. Then, eaten up with your own importance, you became arrogant and insulting to my guests and myself.

"You never would have dared to burn that dollar bill if you hadn't been set up with your ill-gotten gains. I want to tell you that a man who would take a position as a servant to earn a living will always be a servant at heart, and no matter how successful you may be as a result of what you cheated my father out of, you will always be a boorish, badly trained servant to me. Now you can go."

I knew, of course, that her father had told her a highly colored and one-sided story of the transaction between us; but if she thought me capable of being dishonorable as well as boorish I wasn't going to defend myself.

"Miss Abbott," I said, "I shall always consider you a spoiled and bad-tempered young woman, ungracious, even at the moment when I saved your life, unfair to your employees, and so mean-spirited that you would strike a defenseless servant. Good day."

Leaving her trembling with fury, almost ready to pounce upon me again with her ready hand, I walked out of the room and out of the house. I walked all the way to the village before I stopped thinking of other bitter, biting, excoriating things I might have added to my brief summing up of her character.

I told myself I hated her, that I would let her drown if I had a second chance; that I hoped she would marry Anderson and be unhappy ever after; and numerous other absurd fictions. I was probably the most unhappy human being who had ever stepped into the possession of a small fortune. If it had not been for Rowe, who owned twenty per cent of it, I might have torn up her father's check.

And all the time I knew that I loved the girl with my whole heart, and that I would lay down and let a truck run over me to keep her from harm. No matter how she might treat me, she owned me body and soul, and all she had to do was crook her little finger to bring me running. That's the remarkable thing about love; you may have every evidence that the person for whom you have a passion is unworthy; you may receive the sort of treatment from her own lips that had been meted to me; you may lose your temper and return the same sort of abuse, but fundamentally it doesn't make the slightest difference.

I had looked upon this fortune as the means of approaching her from an angle which might cause her to look upon me with favor. As it happened, she considered that I had practically stolen it from her father, and it was the means of driving us farther apart than I had been when I was a chauffeur and she was my mistress. My gold had turned to ashes, and no mistake.

I was hanging around the post office that night when she ran up in the light car, jumped out, and went to the window for her mail.

Being aware of her mood toward myself after my parting remarks, I did not wish to encounter her, so I stepped out of the post office, to be buttonholed by Seth Chadwick and congratulated on my real estate deal, which, thanks to Rowe, was all over town. Hardly had I extricated myself from him when I came face to face with Rose. She looked at me with an expression which seemed to say:

"Is it possible that such a horrible creature can still be alive?" Then she drew her skirt, which was so skimpy that the gesture was not in the least necessary, to one side, so that she should not be con-

taminated by touching me, and passed by. A second later she was driving furiously down the street.

"I'll go to Boston, to-morrow," I promised myself.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHIP.

BOSTON in early August seemed superlatively stupid. It can be very hot there, despite its fabled east wind, while the people whom I happened to know in the city seemed all to have flitted to the summer resorts. I wandered over to Harvard to find the yard populated with the earnest folk who attend summer school. To them William Alden, the football captain, was just the same as nobody.

I located the coach who was still in Cambridge, and, with him, put in some enjoyable hours planning the campaign for the approaching season. In some colleges the captain is the supreme arbiter of football; with us the coach was the father and we were all his little boys. I gave my O. K. to the names of his staff of assistants as a matter of course, discussed the possibility of developing a back who could throw forward passes like the lamented Stephens of last fall who was now an alumnus.

I promised to turn up early in September to work with two or three possible successors of Stephens. He told me that he planned to build our entire attack upon my triple menace, punting, end running and catching forward passes far down the field. There was no longer a chance to camouflage me; the game was to build up the strongest possible interference for my act. He had not decided whether to play me at end or bring me back as a halfback, going into the end on occasion.

After three days he departed to some house party or other, leaving me to my own resources. I had deposited my money and had no hesitation in drawing upon it so that I could live comfortably at a hotel. As I had no extravagant habits, I could afford to treat myself very well for awhile without making any great inroad upon my capital.

My presence in Boston got noised about, of course, and a reporter found me out and wormed an interview out of me regarding our prospects, which I made as rosy as possible. The interview bore unexpected fruit in the form of an invitation to visit Harry Breck at his summer home at Marblehead for ten days, to enjoy the festivities during the visit of the New York Yacht Club at that port.

During my service with the Abbotts, the life of the guests at the big summer cottage had seemed to me singularly delightful, which made an opportunity to indulge in it myself too attractive to be refused. Thus, four or five days later, I found myself shaking hands with Harry, who was one of our tackles of the past year, a graduate now, and being introduced to his father and mother. The Brecks had a bigger and finer house than the Abbotts; it seems that the primitive life is not so popular on the North Shore of Boston as it is on Cape Cod. It was a huge and gorgeous mansion and teemed with guests who included a dozen young and pretty girls.

Though my townsfolk at Hydeport hadn't thought anything of my football exploits, I assure you I was a lion at Marblehead. Dazzling girls fawned upon me to assure me how they cheered me until they were hoarse and how they would pin their faith on me for the coming year. I was never introduced as Mr. Alden, it was "Bill Alden, the captain of Harvard, the hero of the Yale game," and the effect upon the person introduced was pretty near as complete as though they were being trotted up to the Prince of Wales.

When I went bathing, I had a flock of girls and young fellows swimming around me, like a school of seals around their king, if they have one. They admired my shoulders and my muscles in asides that I could not help but hear, and if I hadn't been three years older than the average collegian, and rather hard headed, I certainly would have swelled up like a poisoned toad. As it was I suppose I got a bit of a swelled head. All I asked of life was that Rose Abbott could only see me with my court; what a revenge that would be.

One of the big events of the week was a

gala ball at the yacht club. The way the girls at Breck's intrigued to be invited as my partner for the evening would have been delightful if my sense of humor didn't remind me that it was ephemeral glory; in a year I would graduate, and a past captain of the football team isn't any better than the next fellow.

I settled the situation by inviting a seventeen year old sister of Harry Breck, which was the proper thing to do since he was my host. Even then I was assured by several lovely young things that they would pine away and die if I didn't come over for just one dance.

Of course I was hopelessly in love and very miserable, but I bore up under my sufferings very commendably under these delightful circumstances. Who wouldn't? I had collected a Tuxedo suit the previous winter, and I laid in tennis flannels, golfing clothes and sport suits when I found how much I needed them. I was considerable of a dub at tennis and a duffer at golf, but I never lacked partners.

We went over from Breck's in three big autos to the yacht club for the dance, got there a trifle late and found the band already playing and the porch dotted with white dresses and the glowing points of cigarettes, while inside a hundred couples were swirling about in a fox trot. Then I came in for a lot of introductions.

Captains of industry, who owned big yachts in the harbor, shook me cordially by the hand and tried to talk football with me. One man told me that I had won ten thousand dollars for him by my run of the previous season. A score of lovely girls whom I hadn't met were trotted up by reluctant escorts. I may as well admit that I was having the time of my life. Of course I couldn't remember their names and faces, but I wasn't expected to do so.

It happened that I was standing with my back against a post, chatting for a second with a wistful and languishing blonde, when I heard Harry Breck say to some one, a few feet in my rear:

"Quick, while there's a chance. I want you to meet Bill Alden, the captain of the Harvard Varsity. Hey, Bill, come here."

I turned obediently, and, smiling on the

arm of Harry, was nobody in the whole wide world but Rose Abbott, so beautiful that she put out the lights of every girl there.

She was smiling when I turned but the smile faded, and a look of surprise and indignation came upon her countenance.

"This is my old team mate, the chap who saved the game," prattled Harry. I flushed to the roots of my hair and became completely tongue tied. If I had only known she was going to be here, but I supposed she was safe in Hydeport entertaining her own guests.

"You!" said Rose in a tone that told me something was going to break.

"Greatest fellow in the world," said Harry. "Prettiest girl in New York. Get acquainted." With this he abandoned us. Somebody stole my blonde and I couldn't make my escape. I just stood there and looked like a thief caught with stolen goods in his hands.

"What is the meaning of this masquerade?" she asked icily. "How dare you impose yourself on these people?"

"My name is William Alden," I mumbled.

"Do you mean to say you are the football player? Why you are my chauffeur. You've taken advantage of a similarity of names."

"If you consider a minute," I said quietly, "you'll realize that I couldn't deceive Harry Breck. He played on the team."

Rose then bit her lip and studied me with angry eyes.

"Then you are the Harvard Alden."

"Certainly."

"But I don't understand. You were a fisherman, and, and—what did you mean by concealing your identity and coming to work for my father?"

"I never concealed my identity. I went to work because I needed money."

"I suppose you considered yourself smart, pretending to be a servant, and permitting us to patronize you. Probably you came to work for us to spy on my father and worm out the facts about that hotel site."

"You can think what you like." I said sullenly.

She seemed to ponder for a second and then she said slowly:

"I think you are the vilest and most despicable creature that ever crawled. I'm glad I told you all those things when you left. I'm glad I struck you. I wish it had been with a whip."

I winced and tried to think of something sufficiently bitter.

"Please remember that I didn't seek this introduction, Miss Abbott. Being fully informed of your opinion of me, I certainly would not have dreamed of seeking you out this evening. If it will do you any good, I'll go out with you to the stable. I know where there is a good whip, and, if it will make you feel any better, I'll put it in your hands."

"I'd love to give you what you deserve," she said wistfully.

"Come on." I led the way through the crowd and looking back saw that she was following me with a steady step.

Beside the garage there was an old fashioned stable, for some folks still drove horses in Marblehead. My offer, of course, was pure bravado, and her acceptance of it was the same. We were both bluffing and it was a question of who would quit first. I led the way across the grounds, left her at the door of the stable and entered. Several whips stood in an old fashioned whip rack, and I drew down the most wicked looking of all. Returning quickly I handed it to her. She took it but stood irresolute.

"I never did anything to you in all the time I've known you," I said with a burst of feeling. "You've taunted and mocked and persecuted me, reviled me and abused me, even struck me. For some reason you are furious because I didn't proclaim in Hydeport that I happened to be a football player. Now why don't you strike?"

Her eyes gleamed but she made no movement.

"You hate me don't you?" I taunted. "You'd love to lay that across my face. You don't quite dare, do you. Well I'll give you an incentive."

With a quick movement I stepped forward, encircled her in my arms and kissed her impetuously upon her full red lips. They

burned like fire, it was the most maddening, marvelous, thrilling, delicious sensation imaginable. It was worth anything. Then I stepped back and with a grand, eloquent gesture folded my arms.

"Now use your whip," I taunted.

She was white as a sheet, trembling like a leaf, her eyes burned with fury and shame. Then she lifted the whip and lashed me with all her might. But, though my face was exposed, she swirled it around my body. Once, twice, three times.

Then she hurled the whip away from her, glared at me like a beautiful demon, and hissed:

"You unspeakable wretch!"

A burst of sobbing choked her, she put both hands to her face turned and ran away, not toward the clubhouse, but toward the road. I made to follow her, thought better of it, and slowly returned toward the ballroom. What would she do? What on earth had possessed me to kiss a girl who was boiling with hatred of me? Why had she not cut me across the face when it was unguarded? Would she tell her friends that I had insulted her? If she did I would be in a terrible fix, for my prestige would not survive a charge by a girl like Rose Abbott. I didn't care about that, though, it was the lamentable state of enmity between myself and a girl with whom I was insanely infatuated.

What a glorious kiss that was, stolen by main force from such a girl. It was worth anything, any punishment. I was so a-tingle with passion that I hadn't felt the whiplashes. They hadn't hurt me, though my evening clothes were thin. When I undressed, some hours later I found that there were three red welts around my body.

I imagined I could understand Rose's state of mind. She must feel humiliated deeply by that kiss. It wasn't a kiss of love, since I had said nothing to her but bitter words, it was rather a kiss of contempt, or so she might interpret it. The last time I had spoken to her I had been insulting. Why couldn't I curb my tongue? What did it matter what she said to me; a woman forgets her own words but never forgets or forgives a bitter thing told her by a man. And I had been her chauffeur, a

menial, so the kiss degraded her. Besides she believed I had cheated her father and was, therefore, dishonest. What a mess it was, and could it ever be straightened out?

Two girls and a man came upon me wandering in the grounds. One of the girls claimed that it was her dance and that I was cutting it. I mumbled words of apology, and was dragged back into the ballroom. In a few moments I was stumbling through a fox trot while my head was in a whirl. What the poor girl with whom I was dancing said to me and what, if anything, I replied, I haven't the faintest notion. No sooner was the dance over than I was the center of a group, and another laughing girl showed me her card, with my name on it for the next dance.

My eyes roved frantically for a sight of Rose but she did not appear. If ever anybody suffered, I suffered for the next hour. Then I came face to face with her in a dance. She was laughing and chatting with her partner and met my wondering gaze with a look of blank non-recognition. Women are wonderful.

Later in the evening I encountered her again, was included in a group around her. Harry was urging her to make a party at the beach next morning. Seeking an extra added attraction he declared:

"Bill Alden will be along; it's a treat to see him swim, Miss Abbott."

"Really?" she laughed in the easiest and most offhand manner in the world. "How talented he must be. I'm told he drives a car marvelously too, almost like a professional."

This airy badinage from a girl who had violently horsewhipped me not so long ago! Of course nobody but myself understood the fling about my almost professional skill at driving.

"Miss Abbott is an excellent swimmer," I said politely.

"You've met before then?" demanded Harry. "You are old friends."

"Not exactly," Rose replied before I had time to answer. "But we have met before."

A little later the party broke up. Next morning Harry told me regretfully that the Fullers, with whom Miss Abbott had been

staying, had informed him that she had a telegram from her father which had compelled her to return to Hydepore immediately.

So that was that. Every time we met I did something which made it less likely that we should ever be friends. And it was all my fault. What demon drove me to act in such a way that Rose was forced to resent my existence? If I had been tactful I might have explained everything to her satisfaction. We had met this time, as equals, and we might have become real friends. Instead, my inability to return a soft answer had widened the breach so that it could never be crossed.

If I had been an older man I might have understood Rose Abbott and much trouble would have been spared me. Unfortunately the young are literal minded, I was compelled to judge things by what happened and I knew as little about the psychology of womankind as I did of the interior of the moon.

It did seem strange that a girl who inspired me with love should hate me so violently. Why didn't my knowledge of the ungovernable quality of her temper cure me of my infatuation? You would think it would have done so, but I was more crazy about her than ever, and, since that kiss, I burned for her continually.

There wasn't anybody in whom I could confide. A woman might have told me what to do, but I knew no women well enough to talk my case over with them, and I had few close men friends. Always I had been a solitary creature. It looked as though I would remain that way forever.

Fortunately nobody seemed to have noticed my departure from the ballroom toward the stable with Rose, and there were no witnesses of the horsewhip episode. Harry asked me some questions about my previous acquaintance with her, but was contented when I told him I had grown up in the town where her father had his summer home.

As far as further enjoyment of my visit to Marblehead, it ended with that kiss. The young folks railed me a bit about my condition of preoccupation, by absent-minded spells, my inability to flirt, and

finally the girls voted me a bore and began to give me some time to myself. When the day came to return to Boston I didn't regret leaving the place.

Back in Boston I dropped into the real estate office and got some assignments to show houses. It was a relief to be busy and my work was so effective that I sold one house and earned a commission of one hundred and fifty dollars.

At the end of a fortnight I dropped the real estate work in order to get the football season started. I had the Hydeport paper sent to me and followed the social affairs of the town very closely. It annoyed me to read that Anderson was back at the Abbotts' for a visit. Suppose Rose accepted him! And there wasn't anything I could do.

CHAPTER XIII.

BREACH OF PROMISE.

I HAD just come from lunch at Randall Hall, a few days after school opened, thrown myself down in a big chair near the window.

This year I had decided to have no roommate.

Then a knock upon my door broke in upon my meditations, the usual subject Rose Abbott, and how she had mistreated me.

Assuming it was some team mate or student admirer, I called good naturedly to the visitor to enter. There came in a small man with a stiff neck which caused his head to bend sidewise, and an aroma of stale tobacco and illicit whisky. He had no place in a college dormitory and I was about to demand his business and order him out when he forestalled me.

"You're name is William Alden, ain't it?" he demanded.

"Yes. What of it."

"I got a paper for you.

Innocently I extended my hand and received a legal looking document. Although I had never seen one before, I knew what it was, notification of a suit of some sort, a summons to appear in court.

"You was easy," grinned the process

server, and ducked out rapidly to avoid my menacing boot.

Opening the document swiftly I glanced at it. Its contents caused my eyes to pop out of my head. It might have been a suit for an unpaid bill, only I had always paid my bills, or a charge of assault and battery, except that I had only one fight in years, with G. Burton Anderson who wouldn't sue. It happened that it was a suit for \$20,000 for breach of promise to marry Helma Lawson.

Helma, the parlor maid, accused me of failing to keep a promise to marry her. In my wildest dreams I had never conceived such a terrible thing. I had never made love to her in thought, word or deed, I had parted from her in perfect amiability, I had never written her a line. It was inexplicable.

Was it though? She sued for twenty thousand dollars which was the amount I had received from Buffington and Abbott for my property in Hydeport. I knew she was mercenary because she had declared she would accept a tip from Anderson after he had insulted her. The servant must have heard the Abbotts discussing my coup. Helma thought she could take advantage of the fact that I had gone walking with her once or twice and had taken her to that accursed dance in Brownville. But if women sued men for spending a few harmless and social hours with them, no man would be safe. It was abominable.

How had Helma's lawyer known who I was and where to find me? He had sent his runner straight to the dormitory. Nobody at Abbott's knew that I was a student at Harvard. Yes, one did. Rose. Rose!

Was it possible that Rose had done this shameful thing to me? She certainly hated me; was she mean and vindictive enough for this? I could not believe it. Yet Helma was under her thumb. She had cut short her visit to Marblehead because of my presence. She must have gone home furious, with my kiss on her lips, the kiss of a chauffeur, as she persisted in regarding me. Curiously enough she had seemed to hate me to be a chauffeur, had continually taunted me with it, and she hated me more when she found I wasn't one.

Rose had affected to be convinced that I had taken advantage of her father in getting my price for my own land. Had it occurred to her to get even for that coup by persuading Helma to sue me for exactly that amount?

She knew very well that the newspapers would grasp at a suit for breach of promise by a servant girl against the captain of a celebrated football team. How they would love it! And the facts would be brought out that this football hero spent his summer working as a chauffeur for a family in Hydeport. That wasn't so bad. Nowadays, a fellow who works his way through college isn't blamed for earning money any way he can get it. But that I was the type who would make love to a servant girl while I was working in a menial capacity, would cause havoc with my standing in college, it would disgrace me, perhaps even cause the faculty to force me to resign from the team. Did Rose appreciate the full wickedness of this frame-up, provided she was responsible for it? Undoubtedly she realized most of it.

As Rose was a cultured, well-educated, high-spirited, presumably high-minded girl it must be a frightful hate which would cause her to lend herself to so despicable a thing. What had I done to make her hate me so?

And as I pondered over our acquaintance of more than three years and reviewed everything she had ever done and everything she had ever said to me, there suddenly came upon me, like a flash of lightning in the blackness of night, a revelation; no woman could possibly hate a man so violently unless she loved him.

No word, gesture, or intonation of hers had ever been forgotten by me. I could close my eyes and the vision of our every interview would pass before me. The day she sent me around to the back door with my bundles, the day I had pulled her into the boat and she had called me a clod. How she had struggled against being rescued by me, and how she had taunted me with my accent.

When I saw her again after three years she had continued to mock me. She had tried to keep me from hiring out as a

chauffeur, she had remembered my accent and remarked that I had lost it, she had persecuted me during my service as a chauffeur. I remembered the night she had flown at me because I had burned Anderson's tip, the slap in the face she had given me. And then her apology which I had been mean enough not to accept. The interview next day, when she accused me of defying her the night before because I knew I was going to have money in my pocket. How she had abused me for the deal with her father, and how I had reviled her in return.

Our relationship had never been that of mistress and servant for one second. Between us there had always been a clash which meant sex and nothing else. There was the night she had softened and wanted me to take her boating instead of Helma. That ought to have told me something, only I was blind. And, when we met at Marblehead, how to account for her wild anger at my deception, her willingness to horse-whip me. And, after I had kissed her, how careful she was not to mar me with the whip when she laid its lash around me.

I was walking around the room in a frenzy of joy. Of course Rose loved me. Probably she had loved me from the same moment that I loved her, the day of our first meeting. Love is like an arrow. She had been pierced as well as myself. If it were only true! Even this suit proved that she had not stopped thinking about me; a woman doesn't set out to injure anybody to whom she is indifferent. Her love for me was sort of inverted or perverted; perhaps she didn't recognize it. It was up to me to make her realize it.

The Abbotts always lingered at Hydeport until the middle of October. It was now September 29th. I would go down to Hydeport and force myself upon her. I would make a declaration, do something to bring matters between us to a head. This suit was ridiculous, perhaps intended to bring me to Hydeport. Rose couldn't get along with me or without me. Anyway I would go. First I would see Helma and force the truth out of her, she would quickly confess if Rose had anything to do with her suit. Then I would confront Rose,

and if I didn't do anything else I would kiss her again. I'd kiss her again if she killed me for it.

What a tigress she was, what a wonderful wild creature to be tamed!

The coach grumbled when I demanded a couple of days off from the practice field, but, of course, had to consent. I went to Hydeport on the morning train next day. My conviction that Rose Abbott really loved me, despite her apparent attitude of hatred and contempt, was by no means so strong as it had been the day before. In fact I called myself a fool for dreaming of such a thing. It was true though that there was some sort of alternate attraction and repulsion between us which caused us both to do things which could only otherwise be explained on the ground that we were mad.

When I reached Hydeport I went to stay at the Inn, a little hotel I never happened to mention before because it was so insignificant and bad. I got a musty room with a bed, the mattress of which was apparently stuffed with corn husks, where I put in the afternoon very uncomfortably. My plan was to slip into the Abbott grounds that evening after dark, snoop around and try to descend upon Helma if she happened to be sitting out back of the dining hall of the servants, as she frequently did. I had no doubt of my ability to squeeze the truth out of her. If I discovered Rose were mixed up in the breach of promise suit, I would find a way of having a showdown with that fair lady.

Being completely familiar with the lay of the land around Abbott's, I had no fear of being detected until I had accomplished my object. If it happened that Helma were off the grounds, I would wait around until she returned.

At dusk I walked out to the Abbotts', went up the back lane, to which Rose had directed me the very first time I saw her, and watched my chance to slip in through the back gate.

It was very dark by this time, the few lights at the rear of the house did not reach the gate with their faint illumination. I stole toward the exterior of the servants' hall, and saw, sitting upon the bench outside, the fat form of the cook, and the

white shirtfront of Higgins the butler. Helma was not there. Turning toward the garage I had almost reached it when a man threw open the door and ran the runabout out into the driveway. Then he closed and locked the door and climbed upon the driver's seat. In the other seat was the object of my search, Helma. Evidently the new chauffeur had permission to use one of the cars for joy riding. They drove rapidly away, probably bound for Brownville, to the dance hall.

This was very exasperating, but they would be back some time, and the fewer people who were up when I had my chat with Helma the better from my point of view. I made myself comfortable in a chair which I found resting against the back wall of the garage.

It was very quiet, one of those exquisite evenings which come on the Cape in late September or early October. The night was mild and warm and fragrant. Frogs croaked cheerfully in a pond not far away. Faint music came from the house. Evidently the radio was going, but, on the way to the garage, I had noted no signs of young people. Probably Rose and her guests, if she still had them, were visiting some other cottage.

Time passed gently. I did a lot of thinking, but gradually my thoughts became confused and I fell asleep. I don't know what woke me, perhaps I had slept long enough, but I blinked and rubbed my eyes. Everything was still quiet. I had no idea of the time, I might have slept minutes or hours. I cautiously lighted a match, shaded it, and looked at my watch. Good heavens, it was a quarter of two! I had slept for five hours at least. Helma must have come back hours ago, and my job had to be done all over again the next night.

CHAPTER XIV.

BURGLARS.

IT didn't seem possible that a man with a mission could fall asleep on sentry duty, and slumber for half the night in a wooden chair, but that was what I was guilty of doing. With a snort of disgust

I got up, found my limbs stiff and my neck aching from the unnatural position in which I had spent so many hours.

I came around the garage and glanced at the house. There seemed to be a ray of light in the library, something unsteady, for it moved. It looked like a flashlight. Who could be using a flashlight in the Abbott's library at two in the morning?

I felt the necessity of investigation, so I stepped cautiously and carefully in that direction. There was no moon, everything was black and now I couldn't see the light. I crossed the path and approached the hedgerow which ran along the house under the library windows. Suddenly I saw the light again, and then a dark form rose up and swung something at my head.

You learn to be quick at ducking and dodging on the football field. Instinctively I evaded a descending blackjack and grappled with the owner. He was a powerful man about five feet ten or eleven, but I was very strong and when I got a grip on a man with my powerful arms, he was in trouble, as G. Burton Anderson had found out. I struggled with this pugnacious individual for several seconds and then his strength seemed to vanish, perhaps because I was squeezing him too tightly.

He collapsed in my arms, and I laid him on the ground unconscious. As I had not struck him at all, it must have been that he had a weak heart. I picked up his weapon which lay on the path, meditated hitting him over the head with it to keep him unconscious while I investigated, but I couldn't strike a person who was lying helpless. I would take a chance he would not recover for a few moments.

His presence, with the light I had seen flashing, had convinced me that the house was being burglarized. This fellow had been a lookout, but he had proved to be a poor one. Perhaps he had not known himself that his heart would not stand a bear hug.

I saw that the library window beyond was wide open and as the window sill was only the height of my breast, I was able to look inside. The sight was one to chill the blood. The flash was playing upon a big steel safe which stood in a corner

of the room. Stooping in front of the safe and working the knobs was Abbott himself and the reason for his action was a man with a white handkerchief over his face who stood beside him pointing a gun at him. A second man had opened a suitcase, and was prepared to pile into it the contents of the safe when the door was opened.

How they had succeeded in capturing Mr. Abbott and bringing him to his own library at the dead of night to perform such a service for them I did not know at the time. Something had to be done by me to prevent a burglary.

Acting entirely upon impulse, I suddenly pulled myself up by my hands and catapulted head first into the room. The man with the light heard the noise, pointed the flash and at the same instant fired.

The fact that I fell to the floor saved me. I heard Abbott grapple with one of the men, and the light dropped on the floor. A man rushed to the window and I tackled him around the legs. We rolled over and over on the floor, until I got a chance to strike him with all my force on the chin, when I felt his grip slacken. At this moment a second man darted by me, and went out through the window. I got to my feet, ran after the escaping burglar and missed grasping him by a hand's breadth.

The man I had struck now rose, and I rushed him. From somewhere he had pulled a gun, and he fired point blank at me. One bullet missed, but the other caught me in the left upper arm near the shoulder. I plunged at him, but in the dark I missed my tackle, and he also went through the window. I struggled to my feet and looked around, wondering what had happened to Mr. Abbott.

At that moment the room was filled with light, and the sudden brilliancy blinded me. When I was able to see again, I discovered none other than my old enemy G. Burton Anderson, standing in the doorway, with a revolver which was pointed straight at me. Lying unconscious on the floor by the safe was Mr. Abbott. The safe door was open.

Behind Anderson was Higgins, whose expression of fright was so ludicrous that I smiled in spite of myself.

"As I live it is the ex-chauffeur," ex-

claimed Anderson. "Poke your hands high or I'll drill you with the greatest of pleasure."

"You're not crazy enough to think I'm a burglar," I protested indignantly.

"I don't think so, I know it," he gloated. "Get them up."

"I'm wounded in the shoulder, I can't get this arm up," I answered.

The man came close to me, drew back his right and let me have it full in the face so that I fell to the floor, rolling on my shoulder and uttering a cry of pain.

At the same moment Mr. Abbott came back to life, sat up, blinked, gazed at his safe and uttered a cry of relief.

"Thank God, they didn't get a thing."

"And I've got the burglar," said Anderson. "It's nobody but that chauffeur you had a few weeks ago."

Abbott scrambled to his feet, came over and looked down on me.

"It's Alden, sure enough," he said. "I never would have believed it."

And at that moment Rose entered the room. I could not see her well because I was growing very faint. Loss of blood from my shoulder and the crashing blow in the face had combined to weaken me, but I knew that she had some sort of crimson bathrobe about her.

"I saw you strike that man, Burfon Anderson," I heard her say. "It was a brutal, savage blow, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I don't care if he is a burglar."

That is all I remember, because I fainted. I woke up in bed. My arm was bandaged, but my head was ringing, and I was limp as a rag. I groaned when I remembered the wound in my shoulder; it might mean that I was out of football for the season, my last season. I had some faint recollection of Anderson accusing me of being a burglar, but that was so preposterous that I didn't give it any consideration. Light was streaming in through the window, evidently it was after sunrise but what time I did not know.

I recalled then that Rose had come into the library and rebuked Anderson for striking me. She had not recognized me in all probability; perhaps she would have

applauded him if she had known who the burglar was. But she must know now. What would she do?

The door suddenly entered and a maid backed in with a tray. When she turned I saw it was Helma and I grinned sardonically. I was going to have my interview.

"Hello, Helma," I saluted her.

She almost dropped the tray as she recognized me. Evidently she had not been informed of my identity; I learned afterwards she had slept all through the disturbance.

"William!" she gasped.

"Your promised husband according to your statement in that court notice you sent me."

"Are you the burglar?" she demanded.

"So it seems."

"Why did you do this, William?"

"To get money to pay you the twenty thousand dollars you wanted."

"Oh," she exclaimed. "How can you?"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself saying I promised to marry you?"

"It was a joke," she said.

"Ah, and with whom did you plan this joke?"

"I won't tell you. I won't tell you anything. Oh, to think I went around with a burglar."

"Better call your lawyer right up and call off that suit or I'll marry you. Would you like to spend your honeymoon in jail?"

"I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world," she declared vehemently.

"Tell you what I'll do. If you put that in writing I'll sign an agreement not to make you marry me. Hand me that note paper on that desk and a pen."

The maid obeyed me and I wrote rapidly:

"We hereby agree not to marry each other." Fortunately my right arm was uninjured or I couldn't have penned that document.

"Sign it, Helma, quick before some one comes in."

She signed and I signed under it. Then I put the missive in the pocket of my coat which was lying by my bed. I forgot to make a copy and she didn't know enough

to ask for one, but that was the end of the breach of promise suit.

It might have been ten or fifteen minutes later; I had just succeeded in eating an egg and drinking a cup of coffee when Mr. Abbott came into the room accompanied by Anderson, and Bill Robert, the chief of police of Hydeport.

"Hello, Bill," I said cheerfully. "Why this visitation?"

"I warn you, Alden," said the chief with an air of importance, "that anything you say may be used against you?"

"Am I under arrest or something?"

"I have a warrant accusing you of attempting to burglarize Mr. Abbott's safe and then assaulting him with a dangerous weapon."

"Indeed."

"Yep. Now we want the names of your accomplice."

"You don't take any stock in this charge, Bill."

"It ain't what I think. It's facts we're dealing with. You're found in Mr. Abbott's library standing over Mr. Abbott who's unconscious, and made a prisoner at the point of a gun by Mr. Anderson, Mr. Abbott's guest."

"What do you think, Mr. Abbott?" I asked the father of Rose. "Do you believe I am a burglar?"

"It looks very much like it," he said coldly.

"I needn't ask what you think, Anderson," I said. "When I get around again I'm going to break your neck for that blow in the face when you had me covered with a gun."

"Where you'll be, you won't break anything but rocks," he sneered.

"Got anything to say for yourself, Alden, before I serve this warrant?"

"Has this fellow got to be present, Bill?"

"This is Mr. Abbott's house. He's got a right to have anybody in he likes."

"Well, I've got nothing to say in his presence."

"Or in my absence that amounts to anything."

"I want to get some information from him, Burton," said Abbott. "Better step outside if he objects to your presence. From

what Rose says that blow in the face was uncalled for."

"Oh, very well," growled Anderson. "He'll only tell you a pack of lies."

He retreated and I felt better.

"Now, Mr. Abbott," I began. "You know that I recently came into twenty thousand dollars, which makes it unlikely that I would return to rob your house."

"I don't know."

"Well, you must admit that I am rich for a burglar."

"You may have blown in that money."

"I'm not so extravagant. Will you please tell me your reason for thinking I tried to rob your house?"

"You are found in my library at two in the morning and overpowered by Mr. Anderson after your accomplices escaped."

"Chief," said I. "Has Mr. Abbott given you an account of this robbery?"

"Sure."

"Will you tell me just what he told you? I have a right to know the charges against me."

"I don't mind repeating," declared Mr. Abbott. "I was asleep in my bed when a masked man flashed a light in my face and awakened me. When I started up he thrust a gun under my nose and demanded that I get up and go down to the library with him. Of course I complied. When we reached the library I found a second masked man standing by the safe. The first burglar ordered me to open it, and I had no choice but to comply."

"Do you think I was one of those two men?"

"I don't know. They had handkerchiefs over their faces, I could only see their eyes."

"What happened when you were opening the safe?"

"The man with the light suddenly turned it away from the safe and pointed the gun at the window. I grappled with the other man and he struck me with something. When I came to, Mr. Anderson had you lying on the floor, covering you with his pistol. I don't think there is much doubt, do you, chief?"

"I'm sorry, Will," said the chief of police. "I never thought you'd turn house-breaker."

"Don't be ridiculous. What do you suppose made the man with the gun turn toward the window?"

"I don't know. My back was toward the window."

"I'll tell you. He saw me silhouetted against the light, climbing in, and he fired, wounding me in the shoulder."

"Indeed," said Mr. Abbott with great incredulity. "And why were you climbing in my window?"

"Because I saw the burglars forcing you to open the safe. I grappled with one, and frightened the other away. You don't suppose he was shooting at a friend, do you?"

"You mean to say you were coming to my rescue?"

"Exactly."

"Hum. I don't believe it, Alden."

"You heard the shots, didn't you?"

"Yes, I heard a shot or two just before I was knocked out."

"Would burglars be likely to fire revolvers and alarm the house in sport? Don't you see that they were frightened away by my arrival?"

"Sure," cried good old Bill Robert. "I knew no Alden would be a burglar. Tell us the whole story, William."

"I saw a light flash in the library and I came in to investigate," I explained. "I was attacked by a man they had stationed as lookout, and I put him out of business. Then I looked through the window, saw the two at the safe with Mr. Abbott, pulled myself through the window and went after them."

"You were so fond of me that you attacked three men who were armed? We found no weapon on you."

"I'm not a gunman; of course I had no revolver."

"You are either the most courageous person, or the biggest liar I ever encountered," said Abbott whose eyes were very cold.

"Well, I saved your safe from being robbed, and in return I am wounded and brutally assaulted and now charged with being a burglar. May I ask how serious this wound is?"

"It's nothing but a slight flesh wound on the outside of the upper arm. Higgins

dressed it and bandaged it. I wish I could believe your story, Alden, but I'm afraid it's too tall for me."

"It's the truth just same."

"You say you saw the light flashing in the library. Now I happen to know the library is invisible from the road. You couldn't have seen it."

"I was in the grounds," I admitted reluctantly.

"Oh, indeed! And may I ask what business you had in my grounds at two in the morning? You were formerly my chauffeur. You left here several weeks ago after making use of information, learned in my service, to your own advantage. There wasn't a thing in the world to bring you prowling around my house in the dead of night."

"I want to be fair and if you really chased away three burglars and saved the contents of my safe I will not be ungrateful. I hate to think of a resident of Hydeport and a member of a respectable native family as a criminal, but the circumstances are very suspicious. Frankly, I think it is far more likely that you used the knowledge of the house and the grounds obtained while you worked here to bring several other criminals to rob the safe."

"Ordinary burglars would not have known the location of my bedroom, they would not have known that my wife and myself had separate rooms, so that she would not be awakened and her screams alarm the house, when they invaded my chamber. Your colleague became frightened, fired at a shadow, you were hit by a flying bullet and happened to be caught. Then you made up this cock and bull story. What do you think, chief?"

"I'm afraid you are right," said Bill with a foolish shake of his head. He was always on the side of the last speaker.

The way Abbott stated the facts I couldn't blame him for his point of view. My own reason for prowling in his grounds sounded quite preposterous, even to myself. My tale of wishing to meet a servant girl to ask her why she had sued me for breach of promise, of falling asleep in the grounds, and sleeping five hours, simply wouldn't be believed.

Evidently Rose had not told her father of my importance at college, and naturally he didn't know of Helma's lawsuit against me. I had blundered into a fine mess and I wished heartily that I had let them rob the safe without interference. Of course I could get out of the burglar charge eventually, but not without all sorts of complications which would prove me seven kinds of imbecile. Outside the door was that malignant G. Burton Anderson ready to poison the mind of Abbott against any story I told. The best thing to do was to wait for awhile and see what would happen. I had a suspicion that Rose would put her finger in this pie, since she must know that she was responsible for my presence in Hydeport.

"Bill," I said to the chief, "will you get busy on suspicious strangers around town last night. I think you will find three men who can't give an account of themselves."

"Not a chance," he nodded. "Regular burglars would come down the Cape in an auto and never go near the town at all."

"I suppose so," I sighed.

"Will you admit, now, that you were one

of them?" demanded Abbott. "Because of your previous good reputation I'll see that you get off lightly. If you turn State's evidence perhaps you won't be sent to jail at all."

"Mr. Abbott," I told him irritably, for my shoulder was hurting. "I saved you from being robbed and drove away three burglars from your house. Now you go as far as you like."

"Can you take him to jail now?" asked Abbott.

"He's all right here," responded Robert. "After all, the poor fellow is hurt, and it's hard for me to think he's guilty. Let him rest for a few hours. I'll put a man on guard."

"Well, on the remote chance that he is telling the truth, I'll not insist on getting him out of the house. If you were not here for robbery, Alden, what were you doing in my grounds?"

"You'll find out in good time. I'm not going to talk any more."

"Very well. So much the worse for you."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



THE SERENADER

"O LOVE, O lily love," he used to sing
Beneath her grating,

"Look down, my love, my lovely love, and fling
Your rose. I'm waiting.

"Descend, my dearest love," he used to strum
Within the cover
Of twilight lattices. "O lady, come
To meet your lover!

"The moon shall wax, the moon shall likewise wane
But I shall never
Grow weary of my serenade's refrain:
'I'll wait forever!'"

He still sings there, though he is sixty-two
And scarce can totter,
Quite cuckoo—for she chose a fellow who
Climbed up and got her!

John McColl.



The Silent Years

By EUDORA RAMSAY RICHARDSON

A ROARING as of distant thunder, a surging of water over a precipice, pain almost beyond human endurance, stifling, smothering, choking darkness, a fever that burned, that throbbed, that raged tempestuously, racking nausea, a heaviness of body, a deadly dullness of mind—out of this slowly, aching, Anne felt herself groping toward a consciousness more terrible than the blind misery of the darkness.

A head, leaden, unbelievably hers, was lying upon a tiny pillow. With a supreme effort she lifted a hand and touched a bandage that reached from her brow to the nape of her neck.

Wearily she opened her eyes, in spite of the weight of lids upon them. A nurse was bending over her, a bright spot in the twilight stillness of the room.

It was hard to talk, but she must call, must know if Tom would answer. Tom—Tom—she heard her voice echoing back to her from miles and miles away. Her question—she must ask it—but suppose—suppose—

“Was Tom killed?” she whispered.

The nurse shook her head. “He was scarcely hurt,” she said.

Anne saw the nurse tiptoe to the door, heard her say quietly to some one standing there:

“She remembered. She asked about him. It would be better for no one to see her yet.”

There was a smothered sob—low and steady weeping. Why didn’t her mother come to her? Why was there such an awed silence?

She was tired—very tired. It would be good to sleep and sleep. Those eyelids were closing again.

The next days came, went. Anne slept, waked, and slept again.

Her head ached, throbbed with the amazing wrongness of everything. The strange noises in the street—the rumble, the rattle, the honking of automobile horns. She was not in Kingston. There it had been quiet. There she would see, through the windows, trees that were green; she would smell the perfume of cluster roses.

It had been June in Kingston. Here, icicles hung from the hospital windows and the panes were frosty. She had been riding with Tom through the soft summer night. A light—an effort to recover the reins—a lunge toward the woods—darkness!

Why didn't Tom come to her? She wanted to see her mother. Her world—her stable, reliable world—was slipping, slipping. Anne wanted to ask the nurse to explain so many things; but asking was hard when one was so weary and when sharp pains shot through one's head whenever one moved.

The doctor came and went. Such a strange, different doctor, with no pointed beard, but a mustache close-cropped like a very young man's, a doctor who wore clothes cut so unlike any Anne had ever seen, and queer shell-rimmed glasses that went behind his ears.

The nurse's hair, too—that was most amazing. It was bobbed like a little girl's. Anne lifted her hand to the bandage and felt beneath it. Her hair had been cut. Her long coronet braids that had been wrapped about her head were gone.

Anne had loved her hair. She was sorry that whatever had happened to her had made cutting necessary.

All the incidents of that night when she and Tom had been riding home from the dance at the country club came back slowly, and bit by bit Anne, lying so still and unhappy, pieced it together.

The car, the public service car, the only one in Kingston, had frightened the horse Tom was driving, and Tom had not been holding the lines—had not been holding them because his arms were about Anne. He had just kissed her.

It was the first time Tom had kissed Anne. She had loved him, too, all through college days, but Tom had waited to tell her of his love. That had been like Tom. The memory of that kiss now, through her pain, was poignantly sweet. For Anne it was the first kiss of first love.

The nurse tipped in, bent over the bed, and smiled.

"Your cheeks are flushed," she said. "You've been doing some hard thinking."

Anne felt a prick in her arm, a drowsiness

memories could not combat. She slept to wake again and think more of Tom and that dance that had been given at the country club in honor of Anne's twentieth birthday and her house party guests.

Just a week behind had been Anne's graduation. She had not gone to the dance with Tom. Ted had taken her, and Tom had been hurt. It served Tom very right, however, for he had been too sure that she would understand that he had expected Anne to go with him.

Recalling the first part of the evening was not pleasant. Poor Tom had had to come all alone in the hired buggy, for mother and father had come in the carriage, and house-party guests had preempted the public service car.

The worst part of it, however, was Ted's drinking. Her own guest drinking at her dance! It was unspeakable.

Anne remembered how dreadful the realization of what was going on had been, how miserable she was when Tom told her that he had had to take Ted home, but how happy it had suddenly made her to know that after all she would be with Tom, for he would take her home from the dance in the buggy with the flaming red wheels.

Always one could rely upon Tom. Tom! How she loved him, had always loved him! Surely something was wrong, or Tom would come to her. He loved her. Of that there could never be any doubt.

Then came a day when Anne's brain was clearer, when the doctor said that she was out of danger.

"Please tell mother and father and Bobbie and Marcella that I want to see them," she begged.

The doctor nodded gravely. "You are a brave woman. I think you can receive sensibly all that is told you. I'll send for your mother."

Anne waited eagerly. She wanted her mother's arms about her. She longed to nestle her head on the shoulder that had always given comfort. It was not like her mother to stay away so long. It seemed an eternity since Anne had looked into that kindly face.

She remembered the soft gray dress her mother had worn to the dance, the color

that blended with the slightly graying hair that waved so sweetly into the knot at the top of her head.

Mother hadn't quite liked the idea of Anne's riding home from the dance in a buggy with a young man. Bless her heart! Mother was always discreet, but mothers should be that way; and mother had been quite right in saying that girls in Kingston should be careful not to be talked about.

Anne could hear her now: "Remember, daughter, it is a dreadful thing for the gossips to get a chance to roll a young girl's name upon their tongues."

Mother was really only twenty years older than Anne—forty, to be quite exact—but Anne wondered if at twice her age she could have all mother's wisdom.

Marcella and Bobbie too—Anne hoped they would come. She smiled as she remembered her little sister's distress that there was no one who tolerated a child of ten. Bobbie at sixteen didn't want a girl tagging along on fishing trips and at baseball games, and of course a little girl was always in the way at a house party of grown-ups.

Dear little old Marcella—how absurdly gangling her thin little legs did look, and what prominent knees she had! Anne wondered just how long it took a girl to grow out of the awkward age.

Surely mother would bring Marcella and Bobbie with her! And father! Dear old dad! She wanted to see him too.

Anne waited with feverish impatience. The door opened slowly. Mother was coming at last! Anne caught her breath in a little gasp of disappointment. Somebody else had come—a woman who wore such strange clothes!

A hat came far down over her head, hiding all the hair. There was no waist line to the blue cloth dress, no belt of any kind, no tapering of the waist. Impossible, of course, but she looked as though she had on no corset.

The dress was short, though the woman's hair was gray. The face was pink and white; the eyebrows were unnatural—just thinly arched lines. There was—yes, there was a very real resemblance to mother, but mother would never dress like that. The

woman came closer to the bed, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Anne, Anne," she choked, "don't you know me? It's mother."

She dropped on her knees and buried her face in Anne's shoulder.

"My little girl!" she sobbed. "My little girl!"

"But, mother, you are so different."

"I—I know, dear."

"And I want to see father and Marcella and Bobbie."

"Marcella is waiting outside. Are you sure, Anne, that you are strong enough to stand—anything?"

"Yes, mother—I'm all right now."

Anne waited wonderingly while her mother left the room. She came back with a girl utterly different from any one Anne had ever seen. Her hair was short and curled from beneath a velvet hat that fitted closely and needed no pins. The girl's face was made up like an actress's. Anne looked into the wide blue eyes. It was Marcella! There could be no other eyes just like those. The girl took both Anne's hands in hers.

"Now you know, dear," her mother was saying brokenly, "that it has been many years since you were hurt."

Anne looked about her blankly. What were they talking about? It was only yesterday that her house party had been in full swing, that Ruth and Carol and Ted and Jamie—and Tom—had sat on the rose trellised veranda and talked of the dance; just the other night that Tom had told her that he loved her, had kissed her, had held her for that moment in his arms.

Now to tell her that this really was Marcella; that it had been years since the house party—it was preposterous.

"How long did you say it had been?" she asked faintly.

"Fourteen years. This is 1924. That was 1910," her mother replied hoarsely.

"Where, then—is—T—Tom?"

"Please, dear, don't ask so many questions now. Later you can hear all that has happened."

Anne closed her eyes and tried not to think. Fourteen years. Then she was thirty-four. She had read of cases like that. Such

things happened to other people, and one was merely interested. They could not happen to one's self.

So many years. Youth, then, had been wasted. Perhaps Tom had married another woman. He could not be expected to remember during fourteen hopeless years, but she did expect him to.

"Bring me a mirror, Marcella," she begged.

Her sister obeyed, and for a moment Anne was afraid to see her reflection. That was foolish, she knew. Some day she must. Anne looked. There was not a line. She was young, as young as she had been at twenty. Somewhere she had read—a few months ago—no, years and years ago—that it is the mind that ages the body. Her mind had stood still and with it her body.

Suddenly she was possessed with a longing to be well again, to live so fully as to recover all she had lost, to learn all that had gone on about her unheeded. Little by little they would bridge for her those years. Marcella would help her to be young again, and if Tom had forgotten she would try to forget, too.

So day by day Anne grew stronger, and the story was told her scrap by scrap. At last it was all clear.

The horse had been frightened by the automobile returning from having taken her guests home. She had been thrown from the buggy and her head had been struck. The doctors wherever she was taken had been afraid to operate, saying that perhaps later it would be less certainly fatal to lift the bone, to remove the clot.

She had had throughout the forgotten period a sort of physical existence that had been healthy and not unhappy. Finally a great surgeon had, according to the verdict of the medical profession, performed the miracle that completely restored her sanity. The fourteen years were as blank to her as though they had never been.

At last her mother told her that her father was dead, and almost at once she sensed that something had happened to her little brother. Else surely he would have come to her.

"And Bobbie—where is he?" she asked in dry-eyed misery.

Anne's mother was relieving the nurse, and she and Anne were alone in the little hospital room. Anne, looking into her mother's eyes, felt that she would hear the truth.

Mrs. Evans's lips quivered as she replied:

"There was a terrible war, dear. The boys went over, and Bobbie, along with thousands of others, never came back home again."

It seemed suddenly to Anne that she had passed the place where suffering was possible.

A war! She was remembering vaguely a conversation with Tom the day of the dance—or was it the day before? He was interested in automobiles, prophesying a day when the horse would be supplanted. Then he had talked on about other marvelous things that interested him—the wireless, the airship.

"Suppose, with all this, we should have a war!" he had said.

"Impossible, now," Anne had replied.

"Yes, but suppose some fool nation should do something the rest would just have to take up; think of the ways there would be for killing people—poison gas hurled in bombs, airplanes dropping explosives that would destroy whole cities, signals given by wireless, submarines sinking supply vessels, troop ships. The next war will be inhuman, Anne."

Had all this happened as Tom had dreamed that it would? Trembling, Anne covered her face with her hands.

"A war," she said mechanically. "Tom went over with the airship division, and he, too, never came back?"

Mrs. Evans shook her head sadly, slowly. "Yes, Tom came back," she said.

Then, there was something her mother was keeping from her. Tom came back, and he had gone again. He had ceased loving her. Then she must snatch from life what the fourteen silent years had taken from her.

She was almost well. In a few days the bandage would be off. She would be young, she would be gay. As soon as they would let her read, books would supply the facts of which she was ignorant.

But, oh, the aching misery it was to realize that Tom had been disloyal. Her Tom! Anne clasped her hands together until her tapering fingers went white at the tips, and her teeth pierced her lips until in her mouth there was the pungent taste of blood.

II.

WHEN the time came to leave the hospital Anne found that after the death of her father the family had moved from Kingston in order to give Marcella the gayer life she required. They were living in a larger city, where the fortune Mr. Evans had left enabled them to maintain a manner of living totally impossible in the little town.

"How'd you ever stand that rube village, Anne?" Marcella asked upon the eve of her sister's departure from the hospital.

"I didn't think much about it," Anne replied. "I'm glad now, however, that we are not going back. Do I look old, Marcella?"

"Honestly, I don't believe you are a day older than I am," the younger girl reassured her.

Anne walked to the mirror and again studied her face. Her bobbed hair, with its natural wave, gave her a youthful air wholly absent from the Anne of the coronet braids.

"It's these clothes and this make-up, I suppose," she said, trying to speak lightly. "Then I guess I didn't have much to worry about. I'm glad somebody made me exercise and keep down the weight."

"Oh, we were kind to you," Marcella smiled cruelly, and Anne winced.

How she wished she could forget! She would! Just give her time and the fling with Marcella! Right now, however, she was always trying to soothe the ache in her heart. To have been forgotten by the only man one ever loved wasn't a thing to be borne without a twinge or two.

Anne threw herself into Marcella's gay circle with a reckless abandon that she hoped would keep from her mother and sister knowledge of the terrible effort it was. There seemed to be few in the new city

who knew of Anne's lost years, and absolutely none who guessed her real age. There were times when Anne wept alone in her room and longed for the wheels of time to turn back to the day in which she had been reared, to the social customs she understood, but Marcella must not know! She must adjust herself, must play her difficult rôle in this hectic drama in which she found herself cast.

It would not have been so hard if there had been no Tom. Being gay and not forgetting, however, amounted almost to a tragedy for Anne.

Marcella straightway gave a dance for her sister who had been ill and was now well again, gave it at the country club—so utterly different from the clubs Anne had known in other days. Marcella had taught her the new dances, but even so Anne was wholly unprepared for the mad syncopation of the music and the almost total abandon of the dancers.

As the first youth entwined his body about hers and pressed her cheek against his, Anne's impulse was to strike him a blow in the chest that would send him sprawling on the ballroom floor. She remembered that last dance she had attended, the dance that celebrated her twentieth birthday. Ted had been drinking, and he held her too close. Anne felt now the same indignation that had caused her then to reprove Ted.

Marcella, however, had told her that times had changed.

"Above all, don't be a prude. There's only one thing that doesn't go these days, and that's prudishness."

Anne looked about her at the other couples. All the girls were being held as she was, and they did not seem humiliated. Anne set her teeth and danced on. If she was to regain the youth she had lost, she must enjoy this thing. Surely she would enjoy it—later, when the first shock had worn off.

Hal Caperton looked down into her face. She smelled on his breath the foul odor of a liquor worse than that for the drinking of which she had been so hurt with Ted fourteen years ago.

"Have you had a drink to-night?" the young man asked casually.

Anne started. Had she said anything foolish? What kind of a girl was this man taking her for? She looked at him with eyes wide and made no reply.

"Oh, I see you haven't," Hal smiled. "There's some corn in my car. Couldn't get a bit of rye to-day. Let's go out and be refreshed. You'll talk more then."

The boy took the whole matter so completely for granted that there seemed nothing for Anne to do but comply with his suggestion. Marcella had told her that she was to expect everything to be reversed, but the girl had not mentioned a word about drinking.

Anne had been amazed to see the stuff in the house, but even its presence there had not prepared her for girls and men drinking together. Bewildered, she went for her cape and followed her partner through the French doors, beyond the terrace, to the square where the cars were parked.

Hal filled the top of a thermos bottle and handed the queerly smelling liquid to Anne. She sipped it miserably and tried to swallow. It seemed that the lining of her throat peeled as the liquid fire descended. She took a second gulp and blinked to keep back the tears.

While Hal had turned to find another cup she poured the contents of hers on the ground. Then in amazement she watched the youth consume his portion.

"Aren't you cold out here?" Hal asked. "Every car in the row is occupied except this. Crawl in and get under the robe to warm a bit before going back."

Anne looked from car to car. The man was right. There were couples in most of them. She could see the outline of heads close together, or of the girl's bobbed head leaning on the boy's convenient shoulder.

Marcella had said she mustn't be a prude, and indeed she was cold. Anne stepped into the car, and Hal Caperton dropped down beside her.

"Do you suppose all those couples are engaged?" she asked.

Hal laughed. "Engaged in a pleasant pursuit at present," he replied unsatisfactorily.

"If they're not, the boys won't respect the girls any more, will they?"

"Respect? I didn't know that made any difference. Where'd you come from, honey—a convent?"

Then his arms went about her, and as Anne involuntarily drew away he asked: "Don't you like petting?"

"Petting?"

"Now listen—don't pull any more of that innocent stuff; not with eyes like yours. Be yourself, baby. I know you're human. You can't tell me fellows haven't taught you the art of petting."

"Oh," Anne gasped, "I see what you mean."

Hal touched his cheek to Anne's, lifted her fingers, and let them fall again, passed his palm experimentally along her arm to her elbow, and went in search of her lips. Anne shuddered and drew away.

The only man who had ever kissed her was Tom—and that was only the other day. The memory of that kiss was still fresh, poignantly sweet.

She had loved Tom that night he had asked her to marry him, had held her in his arms for that last brief moment of her conscious life. She had not forgotten, and this other kiss was hateful.

Anne pushed the boy away and jumped out of the car.

"I forgot that I have this next dance," she said; "and you know the ball was given for me."

"You're a funny girl," Hal Caperton commented, but he followed her into the club.

Anne went to the dressing room to smooth her hair and wash the horrible taste of corn whisky from her mouth.

III.

"WELL, sis, I was right proud of you," Marcella announced as she mixed a night cap in the dining room before she, her mother and Anne went up to bed. "Do you find that the world has gone to the naughty little bowwows?"

Anne smiled and did not reply. She was determined to guard against the younger girl's ridicule, Marcella would not be permitted to know what she did think.

"We're going to have a regular party to-

morrow. Do you suppose you have forgotten how to ride horseback?"

"I always rode side saddle, but I'll try to ride your new way."

"It's breeches, you know," Mrs. Evans interposed. "I can't help but wonder what your father would think, but I won't jeopardize my children's popularity by being old-fashioned. These hunt parties aren't even chaperoned—not, of course that I approve."

Anne studied her mother's face wonderingly. Those different words of warning flittered through her mind: "It's a dreadful thing for the gossips to have a chance to roll a girl's name upon their tongues." Perhaps there were no gossips now or perhaps their tongues were things not to be feared.

Then she thought of her father's horror of riding astride for girls, even in the days when the modest divided skirt was the vogue.

"It may be better for the horses," he had said, "but I should not like to see a daughter of mine in such an undignified position."

What would he think of Marcella's breeches? Were any of the tenets of the past worth keeping?

Anne passed a hand across her brow? So much of the time she felt confused and unnatural.

The next day Anne went with Marcella to the hunt club, trying very hard to think happily of the afternoon in prospect. Hal Caperton and Frank Turnbull called for them in Hal's car.

As Anne walked from the house to the motor in her new outfit, determined that no one should discover that she was wearing breeches for the first time, she felt herself turn crimson under the gaze of the passers-by. She was still ill at ease when the crowd began to gather and make merry around the clubhouse fire.

Some one started the radio, tuning in on the jazziest of concerts, and two of the boys, dragging girls from chairs, began the trotty, ungainly dancing. Anne thought of Tom's predictions concerning the wireless and wondered if he had ever dreamed of a use like this.

She watched Marcella light her cigarette from Turnbull's match and blow the smoke in a thin stream through her piquant nose, knowing very well that her own smoking would be a poor imitation.

"Join us, Anne," Hal Caperton urged, passing his case.

Anne took a cigarette and toyed with its cork tip, wondering more about the new custom of calling girls by their first names upon second acquaintance than as to how she would smoke the wretched thing. In a second, however, she realized that Hal was holding the glowing end of his cigarette to hers, and bravely she puffed until the smoke filled her throat.

Some one entering with glasses and a thermos bottle diverted the attention of the crowd and Anne tossed the tortuous bit of paper and tobacco into the fire. Marcella drank her cocktail and asked for another.

"Wait," commanded Hal Caperton, "until your beautiful sister is provided. Here's to the loveliest lady of all who reigns by means of golden silence."

Anne's lips parted in a gentle smile. She felt hopelessly remote from the gay crowd around her, as though the years had sunk their strange impress upon her spirit, setting her apart from those of her own age and from those thoughtless children who live in perpetual pursuit of madcap pleasure. Scanning the faces of the boys and girls with eyes that felt as old as the world itself, Anne lifted her glass.

"Here's to youth," she said, "which having passed, can no more be brought back than the ashes of a dead love can be fanned into flame again!"

A sort of awed hush fell upon the room. It was evident that no one ever gave toasts like that in frolicsome gatherings. It was Marcella who was the first to laugh, but the merriment sounded strained.

"Anne's cut out for the nunnery. For Heaven's sake fill my glass—somebody, anybody," she called.

After that the party grew gayer than ever. In consternation Anne counted the cocktails her sister consumed. Four—five—six—it was impossible. The child surely could not remain standing.

She did, however, and when some one

said that the horses were being brought, she started toward the door ready for her mount. Anne knew that something had to be done. The girl would be killed—or worse!

Anne beckoned frantically to Turnbull. As the young man came toward her, his long, careless strides reminded Anne of a tired ostrich.

"Keep Marcella from going," Anne implored. "She's had too much to drink."

Frank Turnbull laughed in loud, half-drunken tones, and Anne recoiled as though from a physical blow. "Listen, Marcella, your sister thinks you're too drunk to ride a horse. Come on and show her."

For a moment the room reeled about Anne. She thought of Tom and the other boys at the house party. Even Ted, who could so far forget himself as to drink at her dance, would be penitent the next day.

They had all spoken a language unknown to this youngster, practiced a chivalry every boy here would have ridiculed. Helplessly Anne realized that she had with Frank Turnbull no point of contact, but there was a chance that she could persuade Marcella to remain with her at the club while the others rode.

Anne took both her sister's hot little hands in hers.

"Honey, you can't ride now. Stay here with me," she entreated.

Marcella pulled her hands loose and laughed harshly. Her cheeks were flushed. Her dark eyes were wild and uncannily bright.

"Oh, sis, don't be a prude. You think I'm drunk," she scoffed.

"It isn't that, dear, I'm afraid to ride. I'm ill; I want you to stay with me."

"Don't josh me like that. I see your little game. You can't cheat me out of my afternoon!"

Anne looked steadily at Marcella and the little group of which she and her sister had become the center. In quick panorama her other life and this she was leading now passed before her mind. That was real. This was no more than naughty children playing in the shadows. She wanted only to go back, to have no part here.

With the birth of new desire that did not concern her own tragedy, that was as far

from her mad pursuit of happiness as the poles are separated from each other, Anne's mind seemed suddenly as clear as crystal, her purpose as steadfast as the evening star at twilight.

"Listen to me," she said, and it seemed to her that the voice with which she spoke was not her own. "I'm ten years older than Marcella. The last fourteen years have been blank. A fall—a concussion. I'm sent here to-day to keep Marcella from riding. I have a right to expect to be obeyed. We're going home. Will you go with us, Hal Caperton?"

The young man nodded, and Anne saw that Marcella was yielding. Silently they rode home and as silently Anne stole to her room. She seemed completely detached from the life she had for the past few weeks been leading. She was a girl again, and Kingston was her home.

In Kingston it was spring. Jonquils were blooming, and the air again was sweet with the perfume of the first roses, the luscious pink flowers on the bushes beneath her window. Clambering over the old brick house was the wistaria, its narcotic fragrance wasted without her.

She wanted to go back to Kingston. There surely there had been no changes. There, even if Tom had forever gone out of her life, she could regain that youth that was the only youth worth living.

She would go to Kingston in the morning before the household was stirring. There was enough money in her purse for the ticket. Her check would be good at her father's bank. In Kingston they would know her, for after all, the change in her appearance had been very slight.

Then Anne remembered that the old butler was caretaker and that the home of her ancestors was kept much as it had been in the days of her youth—or so her mother had told her. It had all been preserved for her—her beloved Kingston, a refuge from this chaotic world of Marcella's.

When the house was still, Anne packed her bag. The noises of the city street rose to her window—that mad, incessant grinding of brakes, the everlasting honking of horns, the shouts of boys and girls coming home from one of the wild late parties,

trolley cars on the cross street clanging their metallic gongs!

Anne listened, for the first time since her awakening at the hospital not annoyed by the clamorous sounds. Soon she would leave it for the Victorian quiet of Kingston.

With only a note for her mother, Anne left the next morning, and that afternoon stepped off the train at the Kingston station. She was vaguely shocked to see the line-up of Ford cars that had taken the place of the dilapidated hacks she remembered.

There were people rushing here and there in evident haste. No one had ever been in a hurry in Kingston in the old days. Across the street Anne could see a gaudily painted filling station in front of which was standing a bus labeled to convey passengers to a neighboring town.

In terrible fear of being recognized by the two or three people on the platform whom she dimly remembered, Anne pulled the soft hat over her face and lifted the fur choker.

A taxi driver reached for her suit case and inquired where she would like to be taken. Anne flicked the cinders with the toe of her strapped pump and did not reply for a minute. Then, coming to a quick decision, she checked her suit case within the station and walked up the main street of the town.

A huge sign announced that Kingston was the fastest growing town in the State and invited visitors to remain and see for themselves. There followed an enumeration of the factories and other industries foreign to Anne's conception of the town she loved. Still hopefully, however, she continued her walk.

The stores were more crowded, more numerous, larger, uglier than she remembered them to have been. Every one—and of this one fact she was glad—seemed too busy to notice the presence of a stranger.

Fourteen years ago in Kingston a new person created a mild sensation. Girls in extreme clothes—flappers undoubtedly—loafed about the drug stores with boys of the wide trousered, cake eating and tea-bound varieties. Anne felt sick in the pit of her stomach.

Then hopefully she turned toward the older residential section. Here surely one would find life unchanged.

Ah, there was old Christ Church where in frilled organdies she had listened to long sermons! It was the same. So at least a bit of Kingston was left.

Here was a house where she had attended many a conventional party. The front door was being opened. Out came a group of girls wearing knickers and swinging golf bags over their shoulders. Just behind followed a middle aged woman whom Anne recognized as the conservative lady of the manor. She was in knickers too.

A lump rose in Anne's throat, and through the mist that swam before her eyes she could scarcely see. Kingston, too, had changed. All the world had changed. There was no place for her—none anywhere!

At her own gate she paused, choked, blinded, stifled by the memories that came crowding, memories so achingly vivid, so appallingly real.

Yes, old Elijah had kept everything as it was. It seemed to Anne that she should see on the porch Ruth and Carol, Ted and Jamie—and Tom—that she would hear their merry laughter, that Tom should be there, on his face a boyish smile of welcome—her Tom, the Tom who had loved her, the Tom she believed loved her now—some-where—somehow—her Tom!

On her lips was still the memory of Tom's kiss, ineffably sweet—her kiss of first love, the only kiss the years had given her to remember.

Anne approached the broad side veranda, entirely obscured now by the wistaria vines. She wondered if the swing was still there in which she and Tom had sat that last afternoon of her other life.

Tom had been twenty-two then; he was thirty-six now. She remembered the boyish wave of his hair, the clear brown of his eyes, his broad, athletic shoulders; she even remembered the frat pin on his watch fob—like the one she had worn and had not found since her awakening.

"Tom! Tom!" she cried in anguish.

"Anne? Anne, where are you?" came the answer from behind the wistaria.

Parting the plaited vines, a man emerged—a man whose hair was iron gray but whose eyes were clear and brown with something in their depths eternally young.

For a moment he stood irresolute, his eager look questioning, faltering. Then as if understanding were coming, he advanced, hands outstretched.

"I have waited for you here," he said simply.

As naturally as though she had come to keep a tryst, Anne laid her hand in his.

"I came," she replied. "as soon as I could."

"How long has it been, Anne—since—since the ride?"

"Fourteen years, Tom. What have you been doing all that time?"

The man passed his hand over his eyes as though to clear away a mist.

"I—I—lately, Anne, I have not been remembering. Things are getting better now. It was the war—something there—that made me forget. Soon I know it will be all right—now that I have you."

"Begin anywhere, Tom. Tell me something. I was hurt, you know, Tom, on that ride. I didn't know you any more. Later came the war, and you went over. Won't it connect a little now?"

Still holding Anne's hands, the man looked toward the top of the magnolias. His eyes seemed to be seeing into a distant land of infinite sorrow.

"I came back, after something had happened. That isn't clear yet. At first I couldn't remember anything. Shell shock they called it. Scraps of my engineering remained. I studied. It all returned. I came here where I have built roads and bridges, groping for a past."

Anne sighed gently and squeezed the fingers of his hand.

"And you didn't consciously remember even me?" she asked.

"Not until I heard you call my name."

"Then I know why Marcella and mother begged me not to ask about you."

There was a peace in Anne's soul that can follow only the depths of suffering. She saw the expression on Tom's face change from mystification to understanding.

"I have it all now, Anne," he said, "all but how you happened to come to me just as you were that day I told you I loved you, but that can come later. I remember my anguish when you were like a little child, beautiful but so blank. I enlisted in a sort of despair—first with the Canadian forces, then with our own. I have been coming every afternoon when my work was over to this old house. I know now that my subconscious mind was bringing me in search of you."

"Nothing since I woke has seemed real but this house and you, Tom," Anne replied. "I have been a misfit everywhere. There is something so wrong with the world. It isn't like 1910."

"There were real things then, Anne, and you and I have held to them—but the realest of all is our love. We have been set apart for each other by a common experience."

"The silent years, Tom," Anne whispered. "For us they have been eloquent. They have saved us from what has happened to the world."

Tom's arms were about her. He was drawing her to him gently. Anne knew that she had found one thing that had not changed.

THE END



THE 198TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

By KENNETH PERKINS, author of "Sundown Cafe."

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, April 14 to May 19, 1923.)

Published in book form by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago. Price \$2.00.



The Starlit Trail

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Bull-Dogger," "The Gun-Fanner," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

"PLUNK" REVERDY, top-hand cowboy and horn minstrel, on a desert trail, is treacherously shot through the arm by a stranger who then steals his horse. Plunk manages to put a rifle ball into the marauder at long range. Later, the stranded cowboy is presented with a gift horse, sent by the mortally wounded bandit through a Mexican servant. Plunk rides into Mule Town and learns that Tarante, a noted killer, is dead in a distant gulch. Plunk maintains silence in false pride, because Tarante's wound was in the back. Reverdy accompanies as guard the party of old Jackson Brower moving his household to a desert claim. Beautiful Nellie Brower, granddaughter, remains in Mule Town as teacher at the Indian school. Reverdy pursues a bandit, but his gift horse suddenly turns into a man killer, throws and attempts to trample him. The cunning Tarante has struck from the grave. In Plunk's absence, bandits raid the Brower camp, slay two servants and run off the livestock. When Reverdy returns to Mule Town, the old hag, Augustina, a palmist, incites a mob against him, although Nellie Brower refuses to believe he purposely left her grandfather a prey to the bandits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWISTED WIRE.

REVERDY put his hands upon the girl's shoulders. He pressed her aside so that he could go out first to meet the gang.

Nell threw her arms about him. "They'll lynch you!" she cried. "You know that! Don't go out there to die! Let me go

first. Let me get to my grandfather! He's the one who started this."

Reverdy spoke to her quickly as the men were thumping past the general store.

"Before you came, girl," he said, "I was going out there to fight: to shoot down as many of them as stood up before me; to keep on firing until I dropped! But that's changed now. You've changed it all. I want to live!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 7.

"Then let me go—you stay here!" she begged. "Let me beg them to free you—"

"Oh, no! I myself am the one to do that. I'll ask for a chance to say one thing more!"

Events happened then in a whirlwind of action. Not two men could have described it in the same way. Not a single man could have told what each of the leading characters did.

There were many who played their parts; the posse goaded into a frenzy of anger by old Brower's complaints during the long hot ride from the desert; there was old Brower himself, a ghastly looking figure with his arm in a sling; there was the sheriff, shouting himself hoarse, swearing oaths, threatening the crowd with his gun, in a futile attempt to disperse them.

There was the fat and hysterical Mrs. Pikey on the gallery of the Rex Hotel with a jury of women whom she had enraged with her own deft version of the desert raid. There was the girl, who followed Reverdy and rushed into the arms of her grandfather; there was a man lighting a fire; there was another with an old rake handle and some twisted wire.

And there was Plunk Reverdy himself—tall, ragged, unshaven; composed now with a strangely triumphant calm.

Those who had seen him when he came from the desert had seen a Plunk Reverdy that they had never known. Any breed or horse-thief slinking through the street on an old mule would have held his head as high as this broken man.

But here again—with the light beating down upon him fiercely—as if centering upon him and leaving all that grim mob in shadow—here they saw the old-time Plunk whom they had known, whom they had sung with, to whose music they had danced.

Ragged clothes, a torn, sunburned skin, an unshaven face did not make much of a disguise in Mule Town. There he was, the same Plunk they had loved.

But no one knew it—save only the very closest who could see his eyes.

"Don't listen to him!" the veterinary shouted. "We've heard it all before!"

"What good are excuses—and excuses!

What good are lies!" cried another of the posse. "Ole Brower—he's told us the truth!"

"Light the fire there, Soggy! And we'll git this started!"

"What-all are you men going to do!" the sheriff cried at the top of his lungs. "This gang busts up right here—or I'll lock you all up in the hoose-gow!"

The ridiculousness of this threat might have started them laughing—under other conditions. But it was no time for laughing now.

"If any man here thinks he kin start a lynchin'—I'll plug him!" Sheriff Hornuff cried out.

"We ain't goin' to lynch him!" shouted a barkeep.

"No, we promise you that, sheriff. Only you stay out!" said an old rancher.

"Lynchin's far too good for him!" cried old Brower. "Brandin'—that's what he gits!"

The girl's cries were drowned out. The sheriff found himself—gun in hand, surrounded by many men. He felt like emptying his revolver into the hot flesh all about him. But he knew well enough that that was no way to stop the racket.

For a brief moment Reverdy's voice rang out:

"I'm going to say one thing, men: I'm going to square myself. I didn't want to a little while ago. But I've found one person who believes in me. It's made me want you all to believe—"

"Oh, yes, we'll believe all righto!" they scoffed.

"Got the wire ready, Bleak-top?" others called.

"Tear his shirt off."

"Don't let him draw. If he draws—everybody kin shoot!"

It was old Brower—the mob leader—who dispensed this privilege.

"If he draws—you better duck—or he'll kill six of you in the blink of an eye!" the sheriff cautioned.

This seemed to quiet the bedlam; at least for a moment.

"What I wanted to tell you, men, is only this: You all think I lied about a horse. All right! wait till I show you that horse—"

"Yes, show us! Give him a chance to show us a gentle stock hoss buck him off—*him* the best bronc peeler in Arizony!"

Everybody knew that he had ridden into town on a mule.

"Gents!" he cried out. "All I want is a chance to find that horse—and bring him to you—"

"Oh, yes! You want a chance to ride out to the desert agin! Haw! haw! That's a good one!"

"That horse will do his stuff again!" Plunk called out. "The bandit I killed knew that he'd do it every once in a while. That's why he gave him to me. If I bring him back—"

"How'll you bring him back—without you go to the desert to find him?" one man asked pointedly.

"That's where I'm going!" cried Plunk.

This was the touch of humor they all appreciated. They guffawed and then shouted. "Oh, yes, you're goin' to the desert all righto. And you'd ride back to us agin—eh? A lot of chanst for that! If we just let you go! When you go you'll have the word 'Yaller' burned on your hide!"

"Bend that wire into a Y!" Brower called out.

"And run it on his left gashkin—same's a beef!"

"Then let him go to the desert—and stay there!"

"If he's goin' out to the desert—then run a road brand onto him!"

"Make a fish-hook out that thar wire, Bleak-top, and put the Y inside same!"

"Fire's ready!"

"Come on, Delgado—the lass-rope!"

The shouts were taken up by all throats. Nell Brower screamed. And other women screamed, too—such as could see the gang of men in the little corral.

A lariat spun down out of the air. A fancy roper—a Mexican whose name was famous in Mule Town rodeos, was spinning his line. It came down against the shack; whipped out. Plunk Reverdy drew his six-gun, ducked, raised his hand. His left arm shot high up in the air, to ward off the black coil.

But no man in the world could escape

a noose like that. The shack was behind him, a crowd of men in front. The catch was thrown long and clean with a small loop. It hummed, and shrank to a little circle with one flip, catching the arms taut.

A dozen men helped the thrower yank the other end. Reverdy was dragged to the sand. They jumped on his arm, and wrenched his gun away.

The crowd parted. And as they dragged their victim through the rattle weed, old Brower followed. And Nell Brower—the only woman in the corral, followed likewise.

And why not? Did she not have a right? It was *her* trust that this coward had betrayed. A good many of the men thought that she was on their side. *All* women should be on their side! It was a moral problem. And in moral problems women are cruelest, the most unforgiving.

Look at Mrs. Pikey up there on the gallery of the hotel. Look at the women folk with her. Let them see! Let this girl see! Let all the boys see! Let all the children see what should happen to a deputy that turns yellow!

Mule Town and its honor and its civilization were at stake. Should they countenance one of their citizens saving himself before saving the weak? Or should they mark him forever as an outcast of society?

The little fire of barrel staves and mesquite roots sent up a smoky flame. The wire turned red—then white.

The girl followed even up to the fire. No one noticed her now. They were all intent upon that flame—and that twisted wire—and that man.

She wanted to cry out to them to give him the one little chance he had asked for. But she knew how futile her cry would be. She knew how pitiful his last appeal was.

But if God in heaven and that mob would not grant this man's simple desperate appeal—she at least would.

In the crush of that circle of men around the flame she was noticed no more than some of the smaller boys. She slipped her hand to the hip of one of the posse and slid out the six-gun.

Two or three men were kneeling on the sand beside their roped prisoner.

One of them had a wire already poised.

His hand trembled; his face was screwed with determination—but it was as if he were swallowing a bitter drink. That fellow had run an iron on many a picked calf, but this experience was new to him. He didn't relish it.

He was excited; as was everyone else. In that fraction of a moment neither he nor a single man in that sand lot knew what was happening.

The girl, for instance, fell to her knees in the sand. She might have fainted, for all they knew. But she was insignificant.

It was only old Brower who noticed her. He knew that his granddaughter was in a place where she did not belong. Perhaps she had fainted. He put his hand under her arm, telling her to come away.

She came away, lifted partly by the excited old man.

But meanwhile Plunk Reverdy found that one of his bound hands held a six-gun.

It was a gun with a slender stock—just the thing for a long-thumbbed, artistic and lightning hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

DELIVERANCE.

THE thoughts of each man in that scene would fill a chapter—a book. How quickly the scene dissolved—like a hill of ants finding a pebble dropped out of the sky into their midst! The brain of every witness there, save one, was in a mad whirl.

That one was Reverdy, who understood all, whose purpose was the most clearly defined. He was to be branded for something he did not deserve. He would fight to the death. Any man would. If he did not fight he would have been the coward they took him for.

A shot, like the crack of a whip, seemed muffled, remote, even though it came from the center of the gang.

Delgado, fancy roper from Mexico, was standing above Reverdy. A moment before he had been twisting the knots about the latter's wrists till the rawhide cut the flesh. Reverdy had thrust his bound hands far to

one side, bringing the muzzle of his gun athwart his waist.

Delgado alone knew where that shot had come from. A flame seemed to leap from the prisoner's hip. Delgado fell with a groan.

Another shot.

The man with the white hot wire jumped to his feet with an incoherent cry, then sagged at the knees.

A ring of men widened precisely as that lass-rope swung into a big loop with a single flip.

The victim of the mob stood up, bared to the waist, his hands tied behind him, a faint white mist coming from his back. Only a few of that gang knew that he was armed—and they stampeded.

At his feet were the two wounded men. At his side was Sheriff Hornuff, gun in hand. A good many thought that the sheriff had played a master stroke of his own. And yet the men in the crowd who were armed were the sheriff's own men, and they were by no means disposed in that fleeting instant of panic to shoot him down.

It could not have been for more than three seconds that Reverdy stood there—like a savage and dangerous beast loosed suddenly from its bonds. His eyes were so bright, so fierce, so burning that each man had the impression that Plunk was looking at him, challenging him to a gun duel.

The sheriff whispered then, as he sliced the riata with his bowie knife:

"Go on, Plunk! Get to your fresh hoss and vamose!"

In two leaps Reverdy cleared the corral and, running close to the ground—a gray streak like a fleeing sage rabbit—he reached the horse and vaulted aboard.

"For God's sake, chief,"¹ some one screamed in the deathlike silence, "are you leavin' him escape? It was him that plugged me. Do you get that—he plugged me—the murderous rat!"

It was the man who had dropped the white hot wire. He staggered toward the fugitive, holding a limp arm.

Delgado, the fancy roper, was groaning. "You lynch him, you hombres! Lynch him, for the love of God—killer that he is! Don't you hombres let him go now! Don't stare

and gape! We can lynch him now—for a killer! No brandin'—lynchin', so help me God!"

These cries from the wounded men broke the spell. There was a wild rush into the corral again. Deputies drew. Flashes darted from the milling herd.

The slugs whistled past Reverdy's bare shoulders; across the neck of his horse; past the rider's ears. He crouched low over the withers of his mount.

A moment more and the desert trail harbored him.

One figure in the street watched the retreating horseman with a peculiar mixture of chagrin and triumph.

Augustina, the palmist, saw that the victim of Tarante's revenge had escaped the fury of a Mule Town mob. But what is the fury of a group of living mortals compared to the fury of the dead?

"He is gone in search of Tarante's horse, has he?" she cackled, rubbing her horny dark hands. "Well and good. He has escaped us. But will he escape the wrath of the dead?"

Some listened to her; others did not. Mexicans and breeds attached great import to her theatrical sentences; children found her unkempt iron-gray hair and her buzzard's eyes fascinating. No one else paid attention.

But there she stood, her eyes piercing against the sunlight toward the horizon of mesas where Plunk Reverdy was riding.

"In search of a horse, eh? I have heard of horses that led their pursuers into Soda Mesa to die of thirst. I have heard of Papago witch doctors transforming themselves into horses and leading men to destruction—yes, to the nearest we have of hell on this earth—which is thirst in Soda Mesa Desert!"

Again she rubbed her hands and hobbled off toward her palmist's booth in the Rex cantina.

"So! He will follow Tarante's horse across the horizon! Well, we shall see where that trail will lead him!" She went cackling along, her old crimson garments the one violent touch of color in the drab street, her voice the one discord.

What cared she whether the town believed her? It was enough that she herself believed, in her soul, *Tarante had only started to wreak his revenge!*

CHAPTER XX.

THE STAR-FACED HORSE.

AS the days and weeks went by, as prospectors came and went, as herds were shipped to the Santa Fe Spur, as shipments of ingots were sent north from the U. J. mine, as rodeos were held—the Reverdy incident grew dim.

But the memory of that grim and tragic youth was evoked two months later when Sheriff Hornuff came home from an expedition across the Soda Mesa Desert.

This expedition of his had the same purpose as the fatal one which had gone out under the guidance of Plunk Reverdy. That is to say, it was to transport old Jackson Brower and his household to the claim on the southwest of Soda Mesa.

Whereas Plunk had failed, Sheriff Hornuff succeeded. He came back with the news that his charges had arrived safely at their destination. Thus he sought out Nell Brower to give her the good tidings concerning her grandfather—and likewise to give her tidings concerning some one else.

Nell Brower was not to be found in Mule Town. She had retreated to Eagle Feather Cañon, where she boarded at a cow ranch and pursued her chosen calling—her missionary work among the Navahos of that region.

He met her late one night in the sitting room of the Jumbling Deuce Ranch. He sat, with a sombrero in rugged hands, his damp scraggly hair brushed away from a deeply corrugated forehead, his lips drawing nervously at a black cigar.

On the edge of a chair of blistered varnish and warped wood sat the girl, nervous and expectant.

She listened, overjoyed about the news of her grandfather.

"And now—" she began.

"Yes, you want to hear of *him*," the sheriff nodded.

"You've seen Plunk!" she exclaimed.

"No—but from this mucker and that I've heard tell of him."

He puffed for a moment thoughtfully, as if not knowing how to begin. The tale he had to tell must not be spoiled by careless exposition. It was a drama—and the sheriff knew that no drama in the world had an audience so exacting, so intent, so vitally absorbed in its outcome as the heroine herself.

"You remember when them daft jack-asses was goin' to brand him he swore he'd prove his alibi if they let him find that trick hoss? Well, that's what he's been trying to do ever since he escaped the mob.

"He chased down there to the desert just like a kid with one thing in his mind—to get that hoss. Picked up some tracks and follered 'em to the heart of the Bad Lands without figurin' on how much water he had. It didn't matter—so long as he could get that hoss. He was just about dead of thirst when they found him."

He caught the girl's eye. Her hand had gone to her throat. He knew she felt that thirst like a mother feeling the pain of a loved child.

"No—don't get worked up about that. I reckon that kid could stand thirst burning him up. It weren't half as bad as somethin' else that was torturin' him."

"Yes, I know," she said. "Tell me the end first, chief—if you have any feeling. Is he safe?"

"Wall, so fur as I know—"

"And the horse—"

"Yes—it's all about that hoss. The whole life of a young man is sort of hangin' on the character of a ole fuzz-tail. If that hoss don't really do tricks, like Plunk said, why, then, Plunk's name is adobe mud till the day of his death! He might as well turn outlaw, which is the way he's headin'—"

"You don't mean that *you* doubt, chief!"

"Wall," he said uncertainly, pleadingly. "I'd admire a powerful lot to see that hoss!"

The girl flared. "If that's what you came to tell me, I won't listen. I've heard enough lies—"

L. The sheriff stopped her.

"Gal, when I say I want to see the hoss, I mean I want to see him do his trick. I know hosses. Met a lot of 'em. Know 'em personally. Now, that critter weren't no outlaw or killer. He was a gentle ole critter. I know! But I'm open to convincin'. And Plunk must of figured that that hoss would do his trick again. Leave me tell you the whole story."

Again the girl sat on the edge of the chair, drinking in every word.

"Muckers came along that trail travelin' north. They all told as how they met up with a ragged-lookin' hombre with a short reddish beard and bronze color hair, which same asked them had they seen a hoss with stars on its face. And they figured he was heat-struck. And they told him—so's to git rid of him—to keep on the trail south and he'd find said hoss sooner or later. They laughed to me about this."

The sheriff was puffing violently now.

The girl's fists doubled and whitened, her nails digging into her palms.

"And there he was trailin' along south, his mind whirlin' about one central point which always makes a man daft. 'A hoss, a hoss!' he cries to every Papago squaw or Mex or fugitive rustler when he meets 'em on the trail. And all laughin'. And then a sort of miracle happens."

The sheriff puffed mildly again. He wanted to present this part of the drama deliberately.

The girl was almost breathless, her sun-burned forehead wrinkled in anxiety, expectation.

"I heard it all from a Papago gal which I clapped in the hoosegow at Cobb's Coulee for stealin' a calico dress and knifin' a cow hand. I found out she'd been chased out of a reservation for bustin' some taboo or other. Seems like her tribefolk was goin' to kill her, but she was too slick for 'em. A sort of outcast gal with her hand sot ag'in' the whole world. She wandered from this town to that, thievin', and then found it best to trail off into the desert until folks forgot her doin's. *He* found her, there, sick."

"You mean Plunk?"

The sheriff nodded. "She told me all about him. He give her his last drop of

water. He give her food. He give her his burro to trail on down to Mexico. And during it all he must of unburdened his heart to her concernin' that devil hoss.

"Wall, she left him, and said that if she found a water hole she'd come back and light a fire on the mesa where they were at as a signal to him. But he said no, she'd be caught, bein' as the sheriff was snoopin' around them parts."

A sheepish grin came over his face and he pulled the grin out of shape by pluckin' at the mustache.

"Yes," he confessed, "I was snoopin'. And I found her and took her into custody."

"How did you find her?"

"That's just it! I wouldn't of found her—if she hadn't come back to light that fire."

"She came back!" the girl exclaimed. "And she found water for him!"

"No. Not water. It was somethin' else. Somethin' worth more than water—to that boy.

"When he was zigzaggin' out of the cañon northward—with no hope of pickin' up the hoss's tracks again—lo and behold, he seen her fire and he come back. And here comes the miracle I told you about.

"Somehow—maybe because she was a outcast like himself—she knew that it was mighty important for him to find that hoss. One person in a million would of figured as how water was more important. But she—bein' sick and wanderin' in her head—figured right."

He made a slight digression, dropping into the habit of philosophizing so dear to his heart:

"I'm somethin' of a reader and student of hooman nature myself. I've heard somewhere that certain kinds of people see the truth like a big flashin' light. And the sight comes to 'em very often after they're nigh to death. Weak people gettin' well. Sick people, epileptics— Did you never hear of St. Paul? Well, no matter.

"This Indian gal who was a thief—and cast out by her own tribe—she knew that that thar was the main thing in life for Plunk Reverdy. She seen it, she said, right after a prospector had told her she was

within a few miles of a water pocket. And she rode hotfoot back to the mesa, fearin' Reverdy would get too far away without seein' her signal fire."

Sheriff Hornuff laughed now as if this character intrigued him, fascinated him, as a dramatist pleased with a heroic concept.

"What the gal had seen was this. The hoss with the stars onto his face had gone sort of wild and was leadin' a brood of mares. Plunk Reverdy found the tracks and followed 'em. He roped one of the mares, but the rest got away. Then for days he trailed 'em all along the fringe of the desert. A lot of times he caught up with 'em. He even got close enough to plug that very critter he was after. And he had to fight like hell with himself for hours to keep from doin' same. Can you imagine how he hated that hoss?"

"How I hate him, too!" the girl cried.

"Then some muckers saw the boy after he'd been trailin' that brood for days. Crazy? Wall, could a man be much else? He trailed 'em all along one horizon of Sody Mesa Desert. He kept out of the windward of that thar demon hoss, but it didn't do no good. The hoss just played with him, waited till he got close enough, then like the lightnin' he'd be off and his brood follerin' him. Over lava, where there warden't no tracks left. Drop out of existence, as you might say.

"The last I heard of him he was follerin' that band south. And I doubt if he'll ever catch their leader. That hoss ain't like a ordinary wild stallion leadin' a cavy. He's as fierce, mebbe, but he's had a bit of education among hoomans. Knows how to stay just beyond their reach. And Plunk's the one man he seems sot on stayin' clear of."

The girl appeared dazed by the tragic picture that the sheriff had evoked. She sat for a moment as if brooding—as if all the wrongs that had fallen upon Reverdy were weighing her down. The vision of Plunk wandering around in despair, searching for an old horse in the baking arroyos of the desert, was more than she could bear. She struggled; then, as if throwing off the weight, she stood up.

"I'm going!" she said. "I'm going down there to find him!"

The sheriff scratched his head; then said stupidly:

"To find who—the hoss?"

"To find Plunk Reverdy. I want to bring him home. I want to tell him—that I believed him from the first. That nothing he can do will make me believe him more. And he has proved himself to you—if you've got any sense, Sheriff Hornuff! Just one thing—like giving all his water to a sick Papago thief-girl—is enough of proof!"

"You don't mean you're goin' down to Sody Mesa Desert, gal—alone!"

"Of course I am. Not to-morrow—but to-night. And alone!"

"Wali, I'll be damned!"

He sat there pulling at his mustache and chewing at its end. What could he do to keep her from this ridiculous act? Could he persuade her that she would not last two days in Soda Mesa Desert without some one who knew the water pockets? Could he keep her in Mule Town by force?

She was already out of the room, getting her riding gauntlets, her sombrero, her six-gun.

When he got up after thinking it all over she was in the corral saddling a pony. And after the rancher and his wife had asked what it was all about, and he had told them, he came to the following conclusion: "How can I argue her over to my side, when she's the one who's right?"

Not very long afterward Nell Brower was out on the starlit trail alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

REVERDY'S PAL.

PLUNK REVERDY would never have given up the chase for that horse.

There is no doubt about that. But something happened which forced him to go back to Mule Town before he succeeded.

He had run down all clues. For a week he had tried to pick up the tracks where—according to a rancher—the horse had last been seen heading southward. But too much time had elapsed. The only clear

tracks were in hard sand which lasted only until a windstorm came along.

At the end of the week he gave up. He would have to get another grubstake and hit for the desert again.

It was while he was going back to a sutler's cabin on the desert edge that the incident happened that made it impossible for him to search any further.

In the late afternoon as he was riding slowly out of a deep gulch he met a very peculiar man.

He was a narrow shouldered wisp of a fellow with pointed features and rat's eyes. He was leading a cavy of horses.

"Holla, there, pard!" the man called to him. "Which way are you ridin'?"

"I'm goin' to the outfitting post at Gila Sink, and then hitting for the desert again. I'm out of food and water."

"Oh, no, you ain't!" said the affable, rat-faced gentleman. "Not yet."

"I've got all the food and water you kin drink or eat. I stock up for a good long time. Now we'll just set down here in this bowlder wash, and get sociable. I never let a gentleman pass me up in the desert without I make him a bosom pal."

This was the most friendly treatment Plunk Reverdy had received from the hands of any human being since his tragedy. The fact that this stranger did not know whom he was inviting to be a "bosom pal" made Plunk smile.

"I don't reckon you'll be overanxious to have me for a pal of yours, stranger, when you know who I am."

The rat's eyes glittered, showing red whites. The stranger cast a furtive glance at Reverdy's hand and holster.

"What-all may you mean by that, hombre?"

Reverdy laughed. "No, I'm not a bandit," he said. "And I'm not a sheriff or marshal or a deputy. Calm yourself. And there's no reason in God's world why I should draw on you. So don't be looking so all-fired scared at my fingers."

"Then who are you that you're figurin' I'll be counted a enemy?"

"I'm Plunk Reverdy."

This did not seem to have the effect he had anticipated. Plunk went on:

"I'm every man's enemy. Because every man in the world has set himself up against me."

The other was smiling through uneven, yellow teeth.

"You look like an affable cuss," Plunk said. "But I don't expect you to stick to that invitation you just gave out. You can retract. I'll ride on. I'll say good-by—and good luck. No gun-throwing; no harsh words."

The other was still smiling. He had taken off his tall peaked Mexican sombrero, and was scratching a mop of sticky reddish hair.

"I knew that in the first place," he said genially.

"Don't lie—or maybe we won't part as friendly as I said we would."

"I ain't lyin', Plunk. I know you. Didn't call you by name, because I thought you might be travelin' under another. Ain't polite to call a hombre from the desert a name which might be he's cast off. I had a brother killed makin' that mistake."

"How come you know me—when I don't know you?"

"Seen you settin' up on a gamin' table with a banjo, and all the cantina gals and muckers and gamblers sort of worshipin' you."

Plunk Reverdy flushed hot. He wiped his tongue over dry salty lips. For a moment he wanted to kill some one—and this fellow looked like one you could kill without dreaming about him at night.

"Will you have a drink—" the man was saying genially.

Plunk hated him—as he hated every man he saw. He laughed a bitter laugh at those yellow teeth, that tobacco stained chin, that nest of reddish straw which was the man's hair.

"You're askin' Plunk Reverdy to drink with you!" he laughed bitterly. "That's a good joke!"

"Why not?" the other said, dismounting from his horse. "Why not? I know all about you, Plunk. You're a good scout—in my opinion. You've got sense. That's why I'm proud to meet you—to call you a pard."

Again Plunk flushed, his forehead moistening. He tried to wet his lips, but his

tongue stuck and trembled across them. He gathered his horse, and was about to swing off. The fellow must be drunk—or heat-struck talking that way. "Proud to call Plunk Reverdy a pard!" What a hideous jest!

"Look here, Plunk!" the desert rat was saying. "I know a man makes a mistake once in a while. And the world kicks him out. I know. I understand all about your case. Heard about the brandin' an all. You got out afore they run the brand onto you—didn't you? Well, even if you hadn't I'd still give you my hand and call you a brother, so help me God!"

Reverdy looked down over his shoulder. The man was following him. Yes—very drunk. That was the only explanation. No man in the world would talk that way to Plunk Reverdy now!

But Reverdy—as if fascinated at meeting such a freak, held his mount in. The horse wheeled, champed.

"Look here, Plunk!" the rat-eyed man was saying. "*They* kin judge you! But do you think I will! Oh, no. A man does things—and when he does 'em they's reasons. No man in the world has ever been able to say what-all a coward really is! Am I right?"

He was right—but Plunk could not help wondering what that had to do with him. Naturally enough the psychology of a coward had never entered into Plunk's recent tragedy at all. It had nothing to do with the matter.

"Coward—hoss thief—killer—traitor—whatever it is, they's reasons. And who am I to judge?"

Plunk looked down in wonder. He dismounted and went to the man—a little fellow he was—scarcely reaching to the other's chin.

"Say, hombre, who the hell are you anyway, talking like this?"

"Me? Look!"

The fellow brushed back some of the sticky strands of red hair. It revealed the side of his head. Where once had been an ear, there was now only an ugly wound composed of concentric scars. He covered the hideous spot with his long strands again, brushing them down with the palm

of his root-like hand. His mouth again tightened to a grin. Then he held his hand—that same hand which had touched that spot behind his temple—out to Plunk.

"Shake, pard."

"How did it happen, hombre?" Plunk asked.

"I guess you know. Ran a butcher shop and got my cattle mixed as the sayin' goes. They branded me—cuttin' off my ear. You was luckier."

The hand was still out—friendly and hideous.

Now, Plunk Reverdy was a proud man. His pride in fact had once been so great that he had disliked telling any one of killing Tarante—because he had hit Tarante in the back! And here he was being told by a cattle thief: "I'm as good as you. You're as good as me. Come on and shake."

Well, it will scarcely be believed, but Plunk Reverdy took that hand.

And the reason for it was this: He considered every man in the world as rotten as that cattle and horse thief. Furthermore—he considered that thief better than any man in the world, because he did not set himself above his fellow beings.

"And you'll have a drink, pard?"

Plunk took it. Then the other took one.

They drank out of the same flask; from the same nozzle.

"To your health, pard," Reverdy said.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HERALD-PRIEST.

BUT that handshake and drink were by no means the end of Reverdy's adventure with the horse thief, Slink Bottiller.

They parted company after supper. Reverdy slept high up toward the rim of the gulch. The next morning after riding out of the gulch, crossing the mesa top and starting down on the other side, he saw the one-eared man again.

This time, however, it was a very distant view.

He looked far down into a cañon, where the sun's rays were just slanting across the

floor of sage and sand. The walls of the cañon were heavily timbered. One side was still dark. The other—the western side—caught the sunlight gloriously against a red façade of quartz and granite pillars.

On the flat floor of the cañon Reverdy could see a band of horses. These, of course, commanded his sharpest gaze. His horse—the devil-horse which had caused his downfall—might be of their number.

As he wound down the steep trail toward them, he saw a man ride from the darkness of the timbered slope and give chase to the cavy.

The man swung a wide loop in his lariat, singled out a horse from the cavy, roped it and took in the slack of his lariat with dallies around the saddlehorn.

The horse was thrown. At the same instant, Reverdy, looking down from the edge of the cañon, saw a band of riders coming out of the forest of piñones and sycamore on the western slope.

They rode down in a disordered band, one raider far in the lead.

The horse-thief looked up in time to drop his lariat, wheel his mount and get under way before the band surrounded him. The foremost of the riders, however, fired.

The fugitive fired back, and his shot found its mark.

The pursuer dropped from his horse and rolled to the sand. One or two of his companions dismounted and went to him while the rest gave chase. Whether the victim of the horse-thief's bullet was killed or wounded, Plunk could not ascertain.

For a few moments he watched this drama with the aloofness of a human being watching the frantic efforts of some sort of insect being pursued by ants. He did not realize that the whole incident had taken place almost under his very nose until the horse-thief was urging his mount up the slope at his feet.

Then it was that Reverdy saw that the pursuers—coming out in greater numbers from the forest on the cañon side—had grown to a big band.

At first sight he had seen that they were breeds or Indians, but not until they reached the base of the slope, was he sure that they were Navahos.

The horse-thief—needless to say, was his “pard” of the night before—Slink Bottiler.

Slink kicked viciously at his mount as he topped the rim of the cañon. Reverdy had wheeled his own horse preparatory to flight.

“Get out of here, pronto, Plunk!” Slink called to him. “They won’t ask no questions—they renegades.”

Plunk took him at his word. From what he had heard about some of those Navahos he decided to avoid any complication.

A man acquainted with their tricks and manners knew that for a week or two it would be wise to get out of that vicinity.

Plunk turned his horse and started at a mad gallop along the top of the mesa, in the direction of Mule Town.

Slink Bottiler took another tack and disappeared in a deep ravine where his horse slid on haunches down an adobe bank for a good hundred yards.

When the pursuers reached the mesa top they saw a rider galloping his horse through the sage. Naturally enough they followed him.

It was Plunk Reverdy.

The latter could not help thinking, as he galloped his horse along, that destiny was calling him to account for shaking the hand of that horse-thief.

To show the far-reaching results of Slink Bottiler’s adventure with those Navahos it is necessary to transfer this account for a short space to the activities of Mule Town.

When I say activities, I speak figuratively. The only active inhabitants of Mule Town on a hot day are the horse-flies.

The cantinas were as quiet as empty barns. The rows of ponies at the water troughs at the sidewalk’s edge stood dumb and drowsy with scarcely enough energy to swish their tails.

A certain species of humanity which is impervious to sun, wind, blowing sand—to everything in fact except water—could be found in the street: I mean the Mexican kids, half-clothed and playing in the hot dust. You could hear a guitar sounding “La Paloma” through an adobe doorway, in hesitant plunks.

Into this scene of deadly heat, peace and

ennui, rode a half-breed Navaho and Mexican. He was an insolent looking fellow with slits of eyes, a flat brown face, big jaws and the shoulders and arms of a gorilla.

He singled out the best cantina in town—the Rex—and ordered refreshment. Usually a man of his stamp had the decency to stay on the Mexican side of the street.

He was refused a drink.

At this, he said, “No matter!” and asked for the sheriff.

“He’s from John Powderhorn’s outfit,” the veterinary whispered. “Better get the sheriff.”

The barkeep was glad enough to get out.

The breed meanwhile slouched over to one of the gaming tables and threw himself into a chair. They could refuse him a drink; they could turn their backs on him; they could even attempt to throw him out—and most probably they would succeed. But wait! Every score would be settled.

“Who the hell is that hombre?” one of the gamblers asked the veterinary.

“Don’t know, but I know his chief. A half-breed Navaho lives over in a ole ghost town in the Sierra and has gathered a couple hundred of the worst desert wolves about him ever bred in this country. Powderhorn’s his name—and our sheriff you kin bet keeps clear of him.”

“What’s the matter with the Board of Indian Commissioners then?” the gambler asked.

“They keep clear, too. Leastwise they try not to see anything shady Powderhorn does. As a matter of fact, the old renegade keeps clear of them, too. He don’t bother us white men—not out and out. He raided a Mex town in Sonora a couple years back, and they say it was only because of some petty spite. Anyways, he killed every man, woman and child in that town—and burnt same to the ground! Which the town ain’t never been rebuilt since.”

“Did you say two hundred renegades?” the gambler asked incredulously.

“That’s all as he has at his own settlement. But they’s a tribe of Yumans in a cañon near by. Might you’ve heard tell of Yumans?”

The other nodded.

"They're the same compared with Hopis or Navahos as desert coyotes is to dogs. They're lean, allus fightin' drunk. Can go four days without water in the desert—which no other tribes can.

"Well, pard, this fellow John Powderhorn has a sway over 'em. They believe he's a sort of witch doctor. He's known to of cured the sick with his cuppin' horn and Jesako drum and such. Fact is, he's got a religion mixed up of all them tribes' beliefs. Sort of a fanatic. Navahos and Hopis—and them filthy Wallapais as well.

"And this tribe of Yumans goes on the war-path any time Powderhorn says so. And the Agent for Navahos up to the San Juan Agency—he cain't pin their murders and thievin's and wars on Powderhorn at all. The wily ole trade-rat gits clear every time."

The gambler looked across his table to the other side of the room where John Powderhorn's henchman was calmly surveying the bar.

"If they're all like that bird," the gambler remarked, shaking his head, "I just as soon stay clear of him. Looks like a buzzard waitin' for somethin' to die."

"That reminds me," said the veterinary. "They do just what you say."

"What-all do you mean—what did I say?"

"They wait—like buzzards till their prey dies—down here in Sody Mesa. Listen to this: A year back they was a train of homesteaders—amountin' to thirty or forty—who went down there, got lost and began weakenin' for want of water. Powderhorn and a gang of his renegades watched 'em from the ravines high on a mesa's edge where it was cooler and they was in the shade.

"They could of told them homesteaders that they were within a couple miles of a good water-pocket. Instead they just watched 'em goin' mad, tearin' off their clothes and plungin' along shoutin' into what they thought was the surf—I mean of course them mirages in Sody Mesa.

"After they was pretty near all daid—'ceptin' one who got to the water-pocket after a day—why, Powderhorn and his

breeds went down and took their wagons and what hosses was left—and their money and grub. That's the kind of buzzards they are."

The barkeep who had been after the sheriff, returned. He said to the giant breed that Sheriff Hornuff was at his office in the U. J. mine shack and open for appointment.

Several men followed the Indian as he went out in the street. Others came from surrounding shacks. The board sidewalks of Mule Town—a moment before deserted—were suddenly creaking with the weight of all Mule Town's population.

The breed went into the little room where Sheriff Hornuff sat, feet on desk.

Hornuff had evidently arranged to have this interview alone. Two ranchers in linen dusters, chewing tobacco, got up when the breed entered, and went into the street.

Hornuff's "office" was a barn of a room with a saddle on the floor, a line of bridles and quirts on the wall, a water-jar in the corner. The place was hot and filled with smoke from the sheriff's stubby cigar.

The breed stood dressed with lop brimmed felt sombrero, black shirt, wampum vest with its corn-and-plant design, and ragged trousers. The latter were tucked up by garters just below the knee, but the fringe trailed in the dust about his lop-sided boots. A big toe stuck out of a ragged boot. He was a giant of insolence and dirt and rags towering among smoke clouds, crossbanded with hot sunbeams.

The sheriff had buckled on his holster which a moment before had hung on a peg.

He knew this breed: a very hard character. He did not know his name. Perhaps he had no name.

"What do you want in this town, hombre?" Hornuff asked.

"I am herald-priest from John Powderhorn."

"Yes, I know Old John."

Yes indeed! He had good cause to know him. Hornuff knew him well! And the United States Indian agent knew him well. And the commandant at Fort Winfield knew him well. A man who had started in as a horse trader and ended up as a witch doctor and a chief.

"Do you mind specifyin', hombre," he said, "just what old John wants of me?"

The breed paused, and there was an awkward silence.

Sheriff Hornuff, realizing that this visit was of an ambassadorial nature, produced a jug.

The breed drank, and his words came more smoothly.

"Bye'm bye, Big Chief sing Navaho war chant. He take witch bundles; he take Jesako drum. He have many braves between this town and Fort Winfield. Fort Winfield no hear 'em news."

"What news for hell's sake?" the sheriff asked.

"Him news of destruction."

"Destruction of what?"

"Of all men, squaws and children in this town, and of the Xacallis. Of everything except only cuitans and whisky. Big Chief John Powderhorn take 'em off cuitans and whisky."

"Well of all the damn yelpin' yaller curs!" Sheriff Hornuff cried, forgetting the necessary dignity of this ambassadorial court. "I've a good mind to plug you here and now! What-all do you think you mean runnin' a blaze like that! A half-breed skunk like you comin' into a sheriff's office and givin' me this gaff!"

Completely unmoved, the breed gave his message:

"White hombre rustle our cayuses. We give him chase. He kill him one of our witch doctors. Youth who is kinsman of Powderhorn; son of his sister. White hombre ride away. Come to this town. He is pale face—and his race must pay 'em penalty. John Powderhorn is just chief. If you find him this pale face rustler and give him to us, Hi-yu-skookum! No penalty!"

"If not—"

"Then John Powderhorn and his braves, his nephews, his sons, and tribes that catch 'em war treaty—all go on warpath. And when we go back to lodge and wickiups and dance cachucha, and chant Dream Chant—then no man will know where your town stood."

"Is that all you have to say?" Sheriff Hornuff replied, his face purple with rage.

The ragged breed nodded, smiling.

"Well, then, get the hell out of here before I mash every bone in your filthy yaller carcass."

John Powderhorn's ambassador obeyed, although he gave no particular disposition to hurry. His withdrawal from the sheriff's office in fact was accomplished with considerable dignity. A ragged giant of a man with a lop brimmed sombrero went out into the glare of the sun. Although he was the most dilapidated man in that whole street, the knowledge that he represented a far greater power than Mule Town could summon was clearly evident in his bearing.

His bearing was, it must be pointed out, a little more than a sulky slouching movement, his torn boots shuffling along pigeon toed in the dust. But he looked about at the crowd as one who pitied the helplessness of an inferior and doomed race.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MULE TOWN PREPARES.

THERE was no panic in Mule Town.

The cantinas were still as quiet as empty barns. The rows of ponies at the watering troughs stood dumb and drowsy, swishing at flies with their tails, innocent of the work they would soon be put to. Mexican kids still made cliff dwellings and pictographs in the hot dust.

Sheriff Hornuff did not believe in panics. But he had a very serious job to attend to, and he went about it quietly.

An hour later—in answer to his summons—a dozen deputies were crowded into his little office—grim, expectant figures looming in thick clouds of tobacco smoke.

The Mule Town folk who had witnessed this gathering of the best gunmen on the range, jumped immediately to the conclusion that there was to be a lynching party. And the man who was to be lynched was probably that laconic, high-cheek boned, grinning breed who had asked their sheriff for a "personal interview." But they were mistaken.

"Gents," Sheriff Hornuff said. "I may as well tell you right off the bat: John

Powderhorn is goin' on the war-path to-morry night."

There was a dead silence. No change of expressions. One or two puffed a little faster—that was all.

"Now, I'll give my orders, then I'm open to suggestions. First I'll say what some of you know already: John Powderhorn's a hard character to palaver with. He knows how to trade a bad burro for a good hoss without sayin' more'n two words. He's got the best hosses on the range—a good many of 'em with brands blotched.

"He ain't rustled any of our hosses for some time, bein' I've kept the peace with him—solely by keepin' my mouth shut and givin' him gifts of whisky and chewin' gum. And they ain't no use us palaverin' with him in the present instant neither. You-all may know that without my sayin' it over ag'in."

"What does he want to appropriate this time, chief?" asked the veterinary.

"The whole damn town."

They all puffed faster at this; they thought; they wanted to ask a dozen questions. Finally the old veterinary suggested:

"He generally gives somethin' in exchange for what he steals, chief—same as a trade-rat. What-all does he offer for our town?"

"That's the truth," the sheriff replied quietly. "He's offerin' to make a trade this time likewise. It seems that some fool renegade has bumped off John Powderhorn's favorite nephew. Bein' John Powderhorn is part Navaho, a nephew means more to him—as you know—than even a son. To kill a Navaho's nephew is the same as killin' a white man's first-born. So there we are: John Powderhorn wants us to catch the murderer and deliver same over to him—so's his squaws kin torture him."

They all thought some more, the veterinary again being the one to make the only suggestion, which was quite an obvious one:

"Well, why not catch him? If it'll save the town and all of our hosses and wives and kids, I'll catch anybody and give him up."

"I reckon we might do it. If we had a couple weeks—and every man in town

helped all he could with the search," said the sheriff.

There seemed to be a movement of enormous relief. Those who had puffed out their cigars lighted them. Cigarettes were rolled, or tobacco juice was spit. They knew their sheriff was good at trailing down criminals. Mark how he had trailed down the dread Tarante—cheated only in his quarry by death. Mark how he had plucked a Papago thief-girl out of the heart of Soda Mesa Desert—and brought her to prison for knifing a cow herder.

Yes, they were all satisfied. Sheriff Hornuff would save the town easily enough. It would take time—but he would catch his man.

Then came the thunder-bolt:

"We have until to-morry night."

This made a very definite change in the attitude of twelve men.

But the veterinary pleaded: "Get him to give us more time, and promise him we'll git his man for him."

"John Powderhorn don't take promises, bein' he knows how easily they're broke by himself."

"Beg him for a few days. Give him a couple barrels of jackass."

"He's too sharp a trade-rat for that. In three days we kin have a few troops of U. S. Regulars from Fort Winfield."

There was no answer to this even from the inventive veterinary.

"All righto, chief," one of the deputies said. "What's your orders."

The chief sat down at his desk. He had thought it all out before calling his men together. He was a methodical man. He reminded the gang of a general about to take out military plans, maps, orders.

Instead his hand emerged from a drawer with a pack of cards.

"I'm goin' to send three of you gents to Fort Winfield. That's the first step in our defense. The three who goes will be the three who draws lowest from this deck."

"Why draw for it? I offer to go," said the veterinary. "I know the trail. It's an easy trail."

"It won't be easy this time," said Sheriff Hornuff. "John Powderhorn has it covered."

"In that case we might as well draw," said the veterinary.

The faces on the men as they drew their cards were as immobile as if they were at stud poker. The men who drew deuces or three-spots acted as unconcerned as a seasoned gambler filling into a straight flush. They accepted their luck with the same philosophy. If Hornuff had designated the three men they would have accepted just as stoically.

A young cowboy, a white haired rancher, a wind-burned, desert-scarred prospector were appointed by the goddess of chance to ride to Fort Winfield for help.

The goddess of chance proposed, but John Powderhorn disposed.

Not one of the three ever got there.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HORNUFF PALAVERS.

THE rest of the sheriff's orders were simple and clear.

"Soggy and Jack will recruit as many men and boys in the neighborhood as can tote guns. Leave 'em congregate here in the street outside the U. J. mine offices. Pink, you take half a dozen men—which you kin draft same anywhere you want—and ride to all the surroundin' ranches. Give the news that John Powderhorn is on the war-path to-morry night, and that all women and children and valuable hosses will be protected if same is brought to Mule Town."

He turned to the veterinary:

"Doc, I ain't anticipatin' no long siege, and no great pitched battle. But I do figure Powderhorn will keep his word to the extent of tryin' to burn down our town. He ain't never kep' his word before—but this case is different. He's got a bit of stinkin' Wallapai blood in him aside from bein' a Navaho with a smirch of Mex. Which you kin always trust 'em for one thing only—and that is to get their revenge.

"Now I make these remarks so's to lead up to a warnin' which I want everybody to take without throwin' any hysterics: they'll be some gunshootin' by to-morry night—unless we find the hoss-thief. They ain't

one chanst in a thousand of findin' same. Which we kin lay to the fact that we-all have got to fight."

"Why you directin' all these remarks to me?" the veterinary asked.

"No, I don't expect you to do much fightin', doc," the sheriff said. "But I expect you to do most of the work. I want the Rex cantina turned into a hospital."

"Holy smoke!" the veterinary murmured. "You shore have a powerful lot of respect for John Powderhorn."

"All cantina gals which can't handle a six-gun will help clean same—and will ack as nurses when the shootin' begins. Let 'em start in right now cuttin' up shirts."

"What sort of war do you expect, chief?" the veterinary asked in some alarm.

The sheriff twisted his mustache and bit the end for a moment. They all waited for his prognostication:

"Oh, I suppose, gents," he said calmly, "just an ordinary Mule Town jamboree."

This seemed to reassure them. They laughed. They slapped their knees; they began to nudge each other and double their fists and throw away their cigar stubs.

"They cain't enter Mule Town without they climb down them adobe banks on the east and west of the cañon," the sheriff explained. "Which it means we'll have good targets. The pass at the lower edge, leadin' from Goldpan Gulch into the desert can be guarded by a few men. The biggest detachment I'll deploy all around the town *versus* the cañon walls. That thar will be our defense."

"Don't you figure, chief," the veterinary inquired, "that we-all should be on the lookout for the hoss-thief which did the killin' and started all this rumpus?"

"You kin all look as hard as you like," said the sberiff with a shrug. "Ask anywhere—at every ranch you ride if any suspicious character has been snoopin' around. Or if any stock has been rustled. We'll put up signs too with a reward. But if you think any man's goin' to show hisself when there's a chanst of his bein' delivered to John Powderhorn's squaws for torture, you ain't analyzin' this thing the right way. Which the way I analyze it is that we get set for a hot time to-morry night."

This was the opinion of all. There were no objections; no suggestions. They knew Sheriff Hornuff handled things in a big way, a complete way. If there was a chance for a palaver he would get it.

If there was a chance to save the lives of the women and children intrusted to his care he would be the first to take advantage of it.

They arose from seats, table edge, window sills.

"One thing else, gents," Hornuff said. "They's a point that's been troublin' me—concernin' this whole business. You've got to warn everybody you see to stay off the open range from now on. John Powderhorn's gang won't be over-sentimental and kindly to anybody which they may meet in the desert and like places."

"We understand that, chief," one of the men answered. "We'll spread the warnin'."

"And they's one person in particular which I wish you'd get the warnin' to—if it ain't too late." He looked around as if trying to single out the men who would take his view of this very personal matter. "Nell Brower," he said quietly, "trailed down there into the desert for to find Plunk Reverdy—"

The men changed expressions. Some grumbled.

"Serves her right. Throwin' herself away because of that yaller-livered coot."

"She was the cause of my gettin' wounded when we tried to brand Reverdy," another grumbled.

"John Powderhorn won't trouble *that* couple, chief!" said a third. "Like as not Reverdy will make some dicker with him, so's to save his own hide."

"'Tain't Plunk Reverdy I'm talkin' about," the sheriff explained. "It's the gal."

"Wall, any gal which she'll ally herself with a coyote like that don't deserve to be warned," said the veterinary.

Sheriff Hornuff showed the first bit of excitement and asperity he had evinced during this whole palaver.

"That ain't the way to talk, doc," he shouted. "You know how it is when you're tryin' to save a calf from dyin'; how you'll work night and day—in particular if it's

a no-account calf, and give it more attention than you would a good big strappin' steer? Wall, that's the way I feel about every little Mex kid that's under my care right now. And it's the way I feel about Plunk Reverdy's gal. I want her saved."

"I'll ride down and see if I kin overtake her afore she hits the desert trail, chief," a cow-herder said.

"She's got a long head start on you, Joe," said the sheriff. "But you're a fast rider. She started last night. Most like she'll spend the hot part of to-day at that sutler's cabin down at the gateway to Soda Mesa. Hop on your cayuse and see if you can get there."

This finished the sheriff's presentation of his defense. The men went about their several duties; the doctor to the cantina to organize the town women; two others went out to enlist the fighting personnel of the town. Another left to find some riders to warn the surrounding ranches.

Finally, the old cow-puncher who had offered to undertake the mission which seemed the most dangerous but of the least importance, mounted his horse and rode toward Soda Mesa Desert to call back Nell Brower.

Now this old cowherder will not go down into history as a very brave man, despite the flare of courage that his offer indicated. Nor will he go down in history as a very important man.

He accomplished nothing. And I doubt if he could have accomplished anything, even if he had been any braver.

When he got down toward the plain where Goldpan Gulch opened into the desert, he saw a band of Navahos heading westward for John Powderhorn's settlement in the Sierra. He did not dare meet them face to face after the warning the sheriff had given out. He even protected himself so far as to hide in a narrow barranca, holding his horse's nose as they passed.

The Navahos looked like animals which had run themselves gaunt in the desert. They were duplicates of that giant breed who had come to Mule Town as Powderhorn's emissary. The cowherder imagined that they had been without water for days, getting their liquid nourishment from quail

eggs, mesquite beans and the blood of rabbits. He recalled also that these savages lived on chuckwallas.

They passed. He came from his hiding place and rode on further south, hoping to find the trail of Nell Brower.

Then he saw another band of them—heading likewise toward Powderhorn's settlement.

That was enough.

The old cowherder considered—after his fifty years or more on that range—that discretion was the better part of valor.

He went home and told the sheriff what he had seen. Apart from that, his ride accomplished nothing. And there was no one else who considered it wise to trail off down there into the Soda Mesa country in search of an inconsequential girl.

CHAPTER XXV.

NELL AND THE DESERT TRAIL.

AT the gateway of Soda Mesa Desert two table mountains came together so that they almost touched. In fact they looked more like one than two—making a limitless plateau with a top as flat as the horizon, cut in the center, leaving a narrow gorge.

A sutler occupied a few shacks here. He had a corral with some horses and mules; a store for the outfitting of prospectors; and—most important of all—a spring of water which made a pool in a clay basin.

At this oasis Nell Brower saw a big-boned Indian watering his horse. The girl decided to rest her own mount, and to sleep during the hot part of the day—as Sheriff Hornuff had estimated.

The keeper of the place came out. He was an old man who ordinarily kept his tongue to himself. These sutlers on the desert edge had to be careful about disseminating news.

In this case, however, he could see no reason in the world for not answering the girl's question.

"Have I seen Plunk Reverdy? No, I haven't. But I seen prospectors comin' north who had news of him. Reverdy had been trailin' a cavy of wild hosses through

the desert. Chased 'em clear to the edge afore he could connect up with 'em. Then he followed their tracks and found same leadin' to a Mexican rancho—and there the whole cavy was corraled—"

"Then he found the horse he was after!" the girl exclaimed joyfully.

"Not exactly. He seen the cavy there—and he said they were the mares he'd been trailin' for days. He knew every one of 'em—a couple of sorrels, three pintos, a claybank with a white hand on her croup; a blue-crane. All of 'em worn out, and their manes clotted with burrs and their hides torn with rock and mesquite. The whole cavy was there—but as for the old king himself—nary a sign!"

The girl sank to a chair in the store. "Where is Reverdy now?" she cried despairingly. "Not still trailing that—"

"Sure! Still as daft as ever. You see, ma'am, he'd almost got there in time. Because them ranchers likewise corralled the ole hoss with the stars on his face. But a half-breed sheep herder comes along and offers five dollars for the hoss. And the ranchers, seein' he waren't much account as a hoss anyways, and totally without spirit, and gettin' on in years, sold him. They found the sheep herder dead that night in a gully. What got him no one knew—"

"I know!" the girl exclaimed. "The horse killed him."

The sutler chuckled. "Well, ma'am, that ain't quite reasonable. You see, he was a gentle hoss well worked over and stove up. Just a ole stock hoss."

"Nevertheless, the old brute had a spell—just as he did when he threw Plunk Reverdy."

"All right, ma'am," the host laughed. He would not argue with a lady. But he couldn't help chuckling merrily to himself: "'Threw Plunk Reverdy'—that's pretty good!"

She argued no more with him. She spent the six or seven hours of baking heat resting as she had planned. It was a hard journey through the depths of suffocating ravines, before she could reach the next outfit—a prospector's diggings. Her hope was that she could obtain more accurate

information there about the whereabouts of her lover.

If she had ever taken that journey she would not have been disappointed. It was well within the limits of the desert, and she would not only have found out where her lover was—she would actually have met him.

But this happy outcome was denied her.

It so happened that several Navaho breeds came riding across the flat mesa-top, then zigzagged down the mesa wall toward the sutler's cabin.

They were anything but prepossessing-looking gentlemen with their matted hair falling under ragged sombreros to their shoulders; their black woolen shirts bagging over coyote skin belts; their holsters hanging over torn denim trousers. One of them, partly Mexican, boasted of the only clean article of apparel—a pair of cheap yellow shoes that buttoned up the side.

They went into the sutler's cabin and ordered chewing tobacco, for which they refused to pay.

"No money," they said.

The sutler, who was always afraid, but whose avarice was more important than his diplomacy, grumbled at them:

"Bein' this is a outfittin' store, what-all are you hombres doin' here if you ain't got any money?"

"We're waiting for one of our tribe," said the only one who could speak English. "Big hombre—giant hombre. Hi-yu-skookum fighter. John Powderhorn sent him to Mule Town with message. John Powderhorn is dancing war dance."

The sutler became somewhat more friendly. The name of John Powderhorn had a miraculous effect.

"All right, gents; you're welcome to make this your headquarters. But I cain't be outfittin' no one without I gets reimbursement for same. I'm a poor man."

"John Powderhorn is on warpath—" began the unwelcome guest. "White hombre killum John's kinsman."

The sutler winced, scratched his stubble chin, then burst out as if by inspiration:

"Oh, that's all right about that tobaccy. You're welcome to it. My compliments, gents."

Knowing John Powderhorn's propensity for chewing gum, the sutler added: "And here's some fresh gum for ole John. My compliments. Don't forgit to mention my name. John's a good square gent."

They shuffled out, laughing. Some of them spat out the tobacco and fell to the gum.

The sutler followed them out and went to the corral where Nell Brower was packing her burro and saddling her horse.

"Look here, ma'am, I've got some powerful bad news for you. You cain't be trailin' for the desert. Get along home as fast as you kin ride. Them breeds are John Powderhorn's men. Powderhorn—he's on the warpath."

The girl took this for what it was worth: as very bad news.

"If you get out in the desert very far, you'll be attacked. And this outfit of mine ain't worth much more'n adobe mud if what they say is true."

The girl had heard of Powderhorn many a time. She knew something about Indians and their ways and their fears. Powderhorn was a medicine man as well as a cattle rustler and chieftain. They feared him as they would a witch doctor. He was a cloud-swallower, a magician. He had once been a coyote—and had turned himself into a mole and then to a grizzly bear. What he said all tribes believed.

"If he's on the warpath, everybody in Sody Mesa Desert better watch their step."

"I know that," the girl said. "Do you think I'll turn back now? I'm going on—to warn Plunk Reverdy."

The sutler held up his hands in disgust. "Wall, if you're still daft on that subject, all right! I ain't got time to argue."

He went back for his holster and six-gun. Also for gifts. He must dispense chewing gum and jugs of jackass and canned tobacco prodigally. Then if he could be sure of the news he must pack up his mules and his horses with what little of his outfit he could save, and get to Mule Town as quick as his beasts of burden could eat up trail.

The girl was just about to hit off for the south, when the breed whom the Indians had been waiting for, returned.

He had come from Mule Town, after delivering his chief's ultimatum. And he came riding in pride.

The gang of Indians went to him and he gave them the news, which seemed to light their faces.

There was a long palaver with their heads together out there near the corral.

Nell Brower and the old sutler watched with a vital interest. It would be best, the girl agreed, that she wait until they left before riding away alone.

But they did not leave. There was more palaver in low voices, low grunts. They cast surreptitious glances toward the girl. Some nodded—others shook their heads of matted dirty hair.

Finally the breed who had ridden from Mule Town shuffled across the weeds and dust, hitched up his belt, and addressed Nell.

"Who are you?"

"Who am I?" the girl exclaimed, with a timid attempt at dignity. She felt the sutler pinching her elbow.

"Don't sass this hombre, gal," he whispered. "Answer him straight out."

"I'm a teacher. I teach school in Eagle Feather Cañon. My name is Nell Brower."

"Where you live?"

"What do you want to know that for?"

Again the old sutler warned her, saying this time so that the breed could hear: "Go on, gal, answer him. He's a polite gent, and it's a polite question."

"I live in Mule Town."

The breed grunted. "Then heap wise if you live somewhere else. Because tomorrow night—pht!—no Mule Town."

His companions laughed at this and shuffled over toward him. They stood behind him, their eyes glowing.

"I am not going back to Mule Town," the girl replied.

"Then where are you going?"

"That is my business."

The old sutler again felt that diplomacy was advisable under these circumstances.

"She's a good gal, gents. She's tryin' to find her man—who's trailin' around this here desert huntin' for a hoss he lost. Might you-all have heard of Plunk Reverdy?"

"You hunt 'em Plunk Reverdy?" the breed asked.

"Yes." The girl felt a surge. Perhaps they had trace of him. "You know who Plunk Reverdy is?"

Their faces were blank. This meant nothing. They were always blank. There was no chance of reading those high cheek-boned visages—or those inscrutable eyes.

One of them said:

"You hunt this no-good Plunk Reverdy who turned *klathmana*—like they have at the Zuni reservation?"

"I don't know what a *klathmana* is," said the girl. "All I know is that Reverdy is a great man and a hero and a fighter."

The breed shook his head.

"Then ees not the Plunk Reverdy I hear of. Hombre which I know, he is *klathmana*—for he has forsake the work of hombre and become as squaw. As *klathmanas* become squaw and do him squaw work—because no like 'em warpath."

"Yes—you have the wrong man!" the girl cried, her face hot, her lips trembling, her fear completely gone. "My Plunk Reverdy is a hero—and he will prove himself one when he finds the horse he is trailing."

"Oh, yes, I have hear some place," said the breed with an insolent smile. "He is trailing *cuitan* with stars on gray face."

The girl bit her lip. She said nothing to this. Even these renegade Indians despised her lover.

"You come along with us, little squaw," the breed said abruptly.

The old sutler backed away. This scene was getting too dangerous for one of his age.

"What do you mean by that, you insolent breed?" the girl cried, backing away to where the old sutler was cringing. She took his arm—as a child will take the arm of a big brother for protection. What a grim and nonsensical gesture that was!

The girl found that she was supporting the old sutler, instead of clinging to him for help. His arm was limp and trembling.

"I take you to big chief," said the breed. "Big chief will say I am wise—bring him hostage in return for his nephew."

"For God's sake, gal, run for your life!

Hop on your pony and ride like hell. No, don't go into the store—they'll burn it down!"

"Come along, little squaw. No like palaver," the breed coaxed. "Mebbe I catch 'em star-on-face cayuse."

The girl paused—on the brink of flight.

"What did you say?" she exclaimed.

"Yes—the cayuse this *klathmana* is trailing. I know where catch 'em. I rope him star-on-face for you."

"Run, gal, I'm tellin' you! Afore they sneak up on you. They're surroundin' us. Duck behind the shack. They won't shoot you. Git to your hoss!"

"You say you know where the star-faced horse is?" the girl was saying.

"I catch 'em cayuse." -

"You lie. You have never seen him. You don't know where he is!" the girl burst out, with a sudden realization that it was all a trick to smooth over her capture.

One of the Navahos jumped—with the precipitant crouch and leap of a puma—at the old sutler, clutching him by the throat. The old man sank to his knees, wailing:

"Don't hurt me, gents! I ain't done nothin'! I'll keep my mouth shut. I ain't resistin'. What have I done? Ain't I give you everything you asked? Don't hurt me, I beg yer!"

The giant breed went toward the girl. She drew her revolver, but he struck it from her with a powerful and lightning sweep.

Then, laughing, without any change of expression on his flat face, he took her two wrists.

She tussled. He unstrapped his belt and started to wind it about her arms.

"If you do that," one of his companions cautioned, "John Powderhorn will shoot you."

The girl looked up with fire in her eyes. She knew a thing or two about Navahos in general—yes, and about John Powderhorn in particular. He was supposed to be a queer combination of justice and treachery.

"Very well," she said calmly. "I will ride with you. But if you lay a finger on me again, I will tell John Powderhorn."

The breed seemed to see the significance of this. He did not want to be shot. He wanted a gift of cayuses and jugs of red-eye, and some spangled dresses and plumed hats for his fat squaw—the kind of hats and dresses the white cantina girls wore in Mule Town.

In short, the breed was performing an act which was complicated by the exigencies of diplomacy and war.

He permitted the girl to mount and he led her pony down the trail. The rest of the gang followed, forsaking the old sutler to his personal fears.

The girl had the correct conviction that as long as she made no attempt to escape she would save herself from being man-handled.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

U U U

NOVEMBER

THE lake quivers with the kiss of the wind.

Little, unclad trees

Mock like taunting urchins.

A fleet of russet leaves

Sails out upon the startled water

To hunt the vanished summer.

Wild geese honk

A raucous, mad farewell.

A sudden snowflake—

Fallen petal of a cloud bud—

Touches my face

And dies.

Sonia Ruthèle Novák.



Here's Wow

By **WALTER A. SINCLAIR**

SO incredible was the man's proposition that Ruth Lowrey stared unbelievably and asked him to repeat it. Although it was an almost preposterous scheme it fitted in so startlingly with her own expressed desire that her interest was intrigued. In her short life she had learned to believe that when she wished earnestly and sufficiently for a thing and went half-way to meet it, she usually attained her desire.

"You got me right the first time," Gilsey Jadwin assured her suavely. "Prove that you can play society woman rôles, and I'll star you."

Here was heart's desire dangled temptingly for her inspection.

Truly enough, Jadwin was not among the metropolis's leading managers. In fact, Ruth never had heard of him before he introduced himself, modestly announcing that he was entering the theatrical field as an independent producer.

But the fact that he was unknown to her argued nothing against his assertion or his

possibility of success. So many strange, determined unheard-ofs were crashing the producing field.

Why! only the preceding season, one of the big successes had been put over on a shoe-string clutched by the former office boy of a leading manager. It was history, how he had sold pieces of the show to lithograph men, barbers and cut-rate ticket barons before he could open.

Jadwin had come to Ruth's apartment after telephoning to ask for an interview. Over the wire he had said he wished to make her an offer. As Ruth was resting after the close of her first Broadway season, with no new engagement signed up, she decided to hear the man, at least.

Jadwin had been very modest about himself, admitting he was new at the producing game, although well versed in theatricals as an employee.

"You don't know me, but I've watched your work this season, and with proper handling, you'll make a star," he confided, flatteringly. "Being new, I can't go out

and sign up any Barrymores. But by the same token, you ain't being begged by no Belascos or Shuberts to let 'em set up your name in mazdas. So we start even. I've got a play, a knockout, and all cast but the lead—a society woman. I got a guy with jack to back it if I can get the right woman. But he's got to be convinced that she can play society stuff—uh—convincingly."

Then he had made his remarkable suggestion.

"This bird also has a yen for social climbing," Jadwin explained, smiling sarcastically so that his white teeth contrasted strongly with his small black mustache.

He passed one hand caressingly over the sleek, patent leather hair which crowned his head. His black eyes either were merry or beady—Ruth could not determine which. He was in evening attire, and repeatedly hitched up his sharply creased trousers legs.

"He made quite a pile in Arkansas oil, and he's come on—come East, I mean, to crash society and to back a successful show. These are his pet ambitions. When he was slaving away out there he used to read the Sunday papers, and he got the bug—became obsessed with these ambitions. He confided that to me after we'd met up, and I promised to satisfy 'em. I can make good on the show end, and the other will follow if he is handled right. But I didn't tell him the order in which I'd put him onto what he wants. To-night he's to meet society, or thinks he is. I promised it.

"Now here's the plot: He and I, all in our soup-and fish, hop into my bus and are driven out to a swell shack on Long Island. The butler eases us in and I introduce my climbing boy friend to the well-known Mrs. Ingraham Dexter. She's there, all in her society rags, and with a lot of high-toning, gives him a peep of high society life on a quiet evening when she's home only to such old friends as me and any friend I may drop in with, see?

"After she has favored him with about a thousand dollars worth of very swell language, little references to the Riviera and all those swell European dumps—uh—resorts—I spring the big surprise ending. This society queen who has been dazzling him isn't Mrs. Dexter at all, but is the actress

I've cast to play the lead in our show, who has taken this means of proving to him that she can play society and get away with it. In a word, she's you—if you can make the grade. What say?"

"Why, the whole thing sounds preposterous," gasped Ruth, but her tone and expression bade him convince her because she wanted to be convinced.

It seemed so like the answer to her wish. Only a few nights before, when she had been leaving an exclusive night club with Parke Townsend, one of her well-to-do admirers, she had exclaimed wistfully:

"This night spent among these people has made me wild to play society rôles. I'm sick of Western tomboy parts."

She had promptly suppressed her yearning outburst when she noticed several people in the small, crowded lobby staring at her. Her name, uttered by one of the staring girls who had identified her, reached her ears.

Ruth had subsided, having spoken her heart's desire. She had been pleasantly successful in a small comedy rôle, a Western girl, which had been fitted to her after Monty Craig used his friendly efforts to promote her from a traveling tent stock company to Broadway. Monty had been a wandering prodigal in those days, trouping with the canvas-tops.

Jadwin tolerantly met her objections and answered her questions. No, his prospective "angel" never had seen Mrs. Dexter. He never had met any society woman. He had formed his impressions of them from actresses who played society drama.

No, Jadwin was certain that his man would not be so offended upon learning the truth that he would refuse to put in his money. Didn't Jadwin have more to lose than she did? If she played her part convincingly, impressively, she would convince this man.

"Don't think this angel is looking for a heavy sugar baby to make love to," Jadwin assured her. "He's not that kind, although I won't promise he wouldn't ask you to marry him. Right now he's all business on the theatrical end—wants to be convinced he's getting the right, high class woman lead. If you can sell him on

it, you're made, for the play is a wow. I'm not tipping what it is until you and me sign up. Incidentally, you've got to show me you can act, too. And I don't mean anything but act."

Eventually Ruth agreed, Jadwin insisted on the test that very night. He had promised his man—Delos Kenyon was the name—an introduction to a society leader that evening. That is why Jadwin had been so impetuous to try Ruth in the impromptu rôle without delay.

The setting was all ready. He had hired the home of a real society leader who was away at some fashionable resort on one of her flittings. The butler, left in charge, had accepted a fat bribe to allow the use of the house for a few hours and to give impressiveness to the scene by acting himself.

An introduction in any setting but a home of luxury would flop, Jadwin had asserted expressively. Kenyon would suspect that something was being put over on him if Jadwin introduced him to a woman at a public gathering or in some hotel lounge. So he had hired a Long Island place. His chauffeur and car would wait to take Ruth there, while he would follow in a hired automobile with Kenyon.

"Give me half an hour to dress, then, and I'll be down at your car ready to go," assented Ruth, rising and dismissing Jadwin.

The moment the man was gone, the young actress called up her mentor and friend, Montgomery Craig 2d.

Monty knew a lot about everything. He had been a trouper, a theatrical press agent, a sun-dodger, and at present was a man of leisure on a small scale, rapidly ridding himself of the ten thousand dollars with which he had been cut off in his father's will. Monty listened with interest to the night's program, and gave assurances.

Accustomed by stage training to dress quickly, Ruth was ready in the half-hour. Attired alluringly in a sheer, expensive trifle of sea green evening gown, quite decoletté, over which she had thrown a ermine-trimmed opera cloak, she looked the young society woman to perfection as she stepped into the waiting car.

The man who sprang to open the door was a heavy-shouldered fellow whose capped head was thrust forward slightly. A peculiarly small head it was, with an insignificant nose and a heavy chin.

Ruth had no chance to get a good look at him before he was driving silently into Long Island. The powerful car swiftly put many miles behind, with Ruth stealing backward glances.

Within the hour they swerved into a private driveway. Ruth had no opportunity to scan the house before which they halted. It was substantial and authentic, set in an acre of hedged grounds.

White pillars framed the big, brass-fitted white door which opened to admit her. A sphinx-faced man of middle age, in modified livery, bowed her into the reception hall. He gravely took her wrap and indicated the living room, which was done in rich, restful tones, softly illuminated by a few handsome lamps.

"Madam is to be seated here when the visitors arrive," prompted the butler, drawing an easy chair up beside a reading lamp.

A trifle breathlessly, yet smiling knowingly, Ruth seated herself and gazed interestedly at the man. Her sudden glance discovered that that face was not always sphinx-like. A baffling expression, almost a leer, leaped and died in those small eyes.

The man was younger than she had supposed butlers had to be in order to qualify. Her ideas were based on stage butlers portrayed by old actors—garrulous, lovable old types.

This chap was hardly lovable. His mouth was thick-lipped, coarsely shaped. His brow was low beneath an abundance of hair. Evidently all butlers were not bald. His face had a network of hard lines which did not look reassuring. She hoped she would not be left alone with him for long.

Ruth felt not a little uncertain as she relaxed in her chair. A faint, indefinable sound which seemed to come from below, almost made her start in alarm. She controlled herself, noting that the butler had shot a sharp glance at her. Doubt, even apprehension clutched her heart.

"You are alone here?" she asked, indifferently.

"Yes—well, no, ma'am," he corrected. "You see, it was thought best that nobody else be in on this—appear, I mean. Sort of private showing. The boss—er—gentlemen ought to be here in a few minutes."

He fussed about, straightening furniture, and then went to the door. Tires rippled presently up the driveway.

"Call me Martin," prompted the butler, just before he opened the door, admitting Jadwin and another man in evening clothes.

Kenyon was a squarely-built man of forty. Set in his red face with its high, round forehead, were two staring, china-blue eyes. He had a small, inquisitive nose, and his pendulous lower lip sagged repeatedly, slipping out of control and constantly being drawn up tightly.

Jadwin greeted her spiritedly, his intent being to prompt Ruth and to put Delos Kenyon at ease. Ruth acknowledged the introduction with graciousness and restraint. Jadwin intimated, for Kenyon's benefit, that he had telephoned her for permission to drop in with a friend for a call. She admitted smilingly that she had set aside the evening for a little seclusion and rest from the social round which enslaved her.

"I suppose, Mrs. Dexter," ventured Kenyon, feeling he must say something, "that your social calendar is quite crowded."

"So crowded that there's no room for the advertisements, or What the Swell Dressed Man Will Wear," smiled Ruth.

Both men laughed generously at this light effort, and the atmosphere became less strained. Kenyon seemed more at ease as he sat regarding her with respectful interest.

"We are inclined to smile at the Europeans, but they take their social round so much less feverishly," sighed the make-believe Mrs. Dexter, confidently. "They made it their entire existence and take their time about it instead of trying to crowd it in with everything else the way we Americans do. Among the Continental and British elite, I never have encountered one who worked at leisure—our failing."

"I never have been there," admitted Kenyon, whereupon Ruth plunged boldly

into an animated verbal romp from Mayfair to the Riviera.

Out of memories stored from books and plays she adapted, as personal observations and experiences, flashes from London drawing rooms, Parisian salons, the casino at Monte Carlo, and ended easily: "But after all, I prefer my own—New York in the season, Southampton, or Florida."

Martin the butler entered at this point and stood expectantly as though she had summoned him. This was a cue.

"Serve the gentlemen whatever they prefer," she ordered, adding to Kenyon: "Gilsey—Mr. Jadwin—calls this his favorite bar. But possibly you don't share his weakness, of which I disapprove."

Kenyon appeared relieved to know it was not necessary to drink in order to qualify socially, here at least. Jadwin scowled covertly, for this verbal loophole had not been rehearsed.

"Nothing, thank you," murmured Kenyon, repressing desire.

"That being the case, don't bother for me then," added Jadwin, waving away the butler, who withdrew. "If you don't mind, Caroline, we will step into your library a minute to conclude a business matter we were discussing as we arrived. It would bore you insufferably to listen, and I know it's bad manners to talk business with you when calling, but that's my weakness. You won't mind. We may want to use your phone in there, too."

Ruth nodded, and the men withdrew to an adjoining room.

Her gaze followed them inquisitively. The jury was retiring. What would the verdict be?

Ruth was seized by curiosity. Relieved for the moment from her exacting role, she could not control her desire to learn immediately how her impersonation had impressed Kenyon.

Disregarding her own unladylike conduct, she moved softly over to the library door. It had not been closed snugly, Ruth noticed. Giving the door a gentle touch, she pushed it ajar a tiny space, just enough to see and hear through. The temptation to eavesdrop and to learn her fate was too great to resist.

She had a side view of the two men as they faced one another beside the heavy oak library table upon which glowed the only light in that room. Peering in at them thus, Ruth felt as she often had done when standing in the wings watching two fellow performers go through their scene.

"Some queen, eh?" Jadwin was suggesting in lowered tone.

"She seems very democratic for a high society headliner," Kenyon commented. "No high toning or anything. I felt quite at ease."

"That's her secret," explained Jadwin. "You ought to see her at some big function, where class counts to raise one out of the mob. But, come! We have no time to stand gassing. The jack."

The money to put on the show, thought Ruth. How strange that Jadwin would stipulate that actual cash be brought out there by the man who was going to back his venture! Dangerous, too. Her thought found immediate expression in Kenyon's reply:

"Here, although I thought it rather peculiar that I had to bring cash. You may not know it, but I had my hand on my gun all the way coming out here. Ready to shoot at the first sign—what with some of these roads infested by hijackers and stick-up men. I was prepared for them, and I had the money well concealed, too. For the life of me, Jadwin, I can't see why my check wouldn't have done as well."

"I explained that to you thoroughly," Jadwin declared impatiently. "Mrs. Dexter has a name and social position to uphold, and she can't risk leaving around a single scrap of paper which could connect her with this transaction. Even if a check went through me—if you got in bad and made a squeal to save yourself, that indorsed check would be corroborative evidence. She's not supposed to be in on this at all. Even here, you're not to make any reference to the thing in her presence. If you do, the deal is off. You and I and your money do all the talking."

"I don't see where she needs to be so holier-than-thou about it," protested Kenyon. "She's in need of money and she smuggled—"

"Hush!" warned Jadwin fiercely. "Are you trying to queer this? You've been introduced, been received as a guest in her home. You've seen what a genuine high-toner she is. What more d'you want, anyway? Want her to come in here and say 'Yes, Mr. Kenyon, I'm a society headliner who went broke at Monte Carlo and need the money to keep up my position, so I smuggled in a pearl necklace to sell to some novoo reesh. And here's my signed guarantee?'"

"Is that what you expect, Kenyon? You show your ignorance, if I may say so. They don't do it that way. As nearly as she could without putting herself in your hands, Mrs. Dexter has placed her O.K. on this deal. I'm acting as her old friend in whom she can put confidence. It was her assured social position that got her through the customs without a frisk. And that's how you're able to buy in a fifty thousand string for thirty grand. If you hadn't agreed to do business without further questions, I wouldn't have gone this far with you. Do you buy?"

"Yes. Don't get excited, Jadwin," snapped Kenyon. "This is the first time I ever was mixed up in a deal that wasn't strictly in the open, and maybe I'm a trifle too cautious. Wait until I unstrap this wallet from around my leg. There you are—count it."

Leather was slapped angrily upon the oak table.

Trembling but determined, Ruth grasped the door and tensed her muscles to swing it wide, dart in, and denounce Jadwin as an impostor and a crook. Indignation braced her for the daring move.

This suave swindler had played upon her ambition, yes, and upon her natural vanity, to dupe her into being his decoy in a criminal scheme. Her arms tightened for a quick jerk at the door. Then—

A heavy, powerful hand was clapped over her mouth, while another brutal paw attached to a muscular arm which encircled her arms, gripped her. Soundlessly she was drawn back against a man's body, in an embrace which held her helplessly in a human vise.

"Keep still, if you don't want me to

choke the life outa you," a scarcely-audible whisper breathed in one ear. "You did your loud speakin' in the supper club lobby the other night."

That iron grip prevented Ruth from squirming around to see who had surprised her. Nevertheless, she had no doubt it was the man she knew as Martin the butler.

In her absorption she had forgotten that he was lurking in hiding, ready to pounce when she spied on Jadwin. As in a nightmare, she witnessed the continuation of the drama.

"Here's her pearls," asserted Jadwin, opening and promptly closing a leather case which he thrust into Kenyon's hands. "Come. Let's get back to Mrs. Dexter. We've stayed here too long now."

"Not before I look at these," objected Kenyon, doggedly. "You wouldn't let me bring an expert. And I don't pretend to be one, but at least I know real from phoneys. If this lady is doing underhand selling she can wait another minute. I only need a glance to assure me if—"

"No, I say!" snarled Jadwin peremptorily, seizing the money.

"There's something queer about this," began Kenyon. "I insist on looking at—"

"Look at this then, if you insist," grated Jadwin, jerking out a dull black automatic which he jabbed at Kenyon's body. "You big sap! I hoped to do this without trouble, but if you want trouble, I'll oblige. Hands up now, until I take off you that rod you mentioned. I knew you had it on you, or we might have completed our deal in the car."

"A holdup!" gasped Kenyon, raising his hands.

"Right, first guess," confirmed Jadwin, removing his victim's pistol and stepping back. "This complicates matt—What's that?"

Ruth had muttered a low moan in spite of the grip over her mouth. At that sound, Jadwin and Kenyon stared toward the door.

Without delay the pseudo butler propelled the young woman into the library, never relaxing his hold. Kenyon glared indignantly, Jadwin evilly, at her.

"She was spying at the door," announced the butler.

"Good work, Lunt," snapped Jadwin. "So, my proud society queen, you had to snoop yourself into trouble? If you'd minded your own business, I'd have taken you away no worse for what you didn't know—including the fact that I overheard you yearning out loud to play society rôles and decided to use you. But now—"

"Now I enter, jauntily," announced a new voice.

Every one turned in startled surprise at this drawling, cheery announcement. From behind the rich velvet curtains hiding the French window, stepped Monty Craig, negligently dusting a handkerchief over one sleeve of his dinner coat to brush away an imaginary speck.

Jaunty, he truly had described his bearing. He smiled encouragingly at the gaping men, and stated: "I hated to do it—to step in. Why, I've paid five-and-war tax to see much worse. So far it's a wow. But you've set such a pace, you're going to have trouble sustaining interest to the end. You were beginning to bog into the commonplace when I decided to add a little kick by making the usual, expected 'unexpected' entrance."

"Who the hell—" gasped Jadwin, wrenching himself out of the stupefaction which had held him dumb during this entrance speech.

He had managed to swing one pistol muzzle promptly in Monty's direction, and this he waved menacingly.

"My dear old chap—Jadwin, I believe the rôle is—some one *had* to create a diversion at this point," expounded Monty. "As a future Napoleon of the theater, you ought to know that dramatic suspense has to be built up by successive steps—the element of surprise—"

"You'd be surprised if you knew what's next—for you," blustered Jadwin, moving his pistol ominously. "Curtains for yours."

"There's where you ought to know that your construction's all wrong," protested Monty, registering pity. "I infer that it's your amateurish idea to bump me off here in the library. Why, that's got to be done in the first act to comply with all union rules and copyright regulations! And this must be the second—or even the last act."

"It's gonna be your last act," threatened Jadwin, staring in bewilderment at this medium-sized, not very dangerous-looking intruder.

"Don't be in a hurry. Get yourself the chair on easy time installments," advised Monty, with mock solicitude. "Very uncomfortable piece of furniture, they tell me, in spite of its being the rage. Young man, have you selected your life's goal, or are you drifting? Is a measly thirty grand worth an Edison settee?"

"Shut him up. He'd gimme the heeby-jeebies," cried the crook who had posed as butler.

His coarse lips were pale and loose, and his heavy, lined face wore a haunted look. Some experience in his past had given him better understanding of what Monty meant, than the other had.

"Ah, the Hairy Ape knows," commented Monty, staring at the mock butler. "My good Lunt, remove your dirty paw from that young woman's face. I'm sure she'd rather keep silent and die than have that mitt over her mouth any longer. Don't worry, my good girl. I am here."

"And likely to stay here permanently," exploded Jadwin in rage. "Say, who the devil are you?"

"I'm the old family solicitor who is knocked off in the library in the first act," grinned Monty. "I read the will which stipulates that she must spend the night here alone in order to inherit the old place. Then you, being disinherited, begin to scare her to death with ghostly impersonations. After you and your pal have run yourselves ragged doing your creepy stuff, you bump into one another in the dark, secret passageway, and shoot each other over. Wow line: 'My mistake.' Curtain."

"Fer Pete's sake!" exclaimed the fake butler, using a much more violent expression. "Call up Matteawan and ask if any of their nutty boarders have escaped."

"My good fellow, can't you see that your boss has both hands full and can't telephone?" Monty reminded him, genially, as he teetered on the balls of his feet.

"Is this guy a friend of yours?" demanded Jadwin, turning to Ruth with an expression of malignance and exasperation.

"He sounds friendly," she evaded. "I would say that any one who is against you is a friend of mine."

"Well said, my good girl," applauded Monty. "And you—Mr. Kenyon—I believe I caught the name correctly—if you will but take example from this girl and at least not let these bush league yeggs get your goat, it will make life easier. And I hope this will be a lesson to you hereafter not to have anything to do with crooks."

"If he gets away," amended Jadwin viciously, and steadied his aim at Monty who had strolled closer. "Stand where you are, and shut up. One more step—one more crack out of you—and I'll plug you."

"Drop that muzzle or you'll be dropped in your tracks," snapped Monty. "We don't want to shoot if we can help it, but you're paging suicide, waving that gat at me."

As Jadwin hesitated, gaping amazement at this sharp order from his prisoner, Monty laughed harshly and mockingly.

"You poor quince!" he exclaimed. "You don't suppose I'd butt in here and talk to you this way without artillery support. Don't move. Don't mo-o-ove, or you'll never know what happened. You're covered from behind these curtains, and your first false move will be your last."

"Who are you?" faltered Jadwin, while a look of hope was kindled in Kenyon's eyes.

Lunt, with worry creasing his low brow, let go of Ruth, and reached cautiously for his hip. Again Monty laughed.

"Don't you know me?" he jeered. "Such is fame! That is what comes of letting you amateurs crash into this graft—bozos who haven't had even a correspondence course in crime. I'm Jack Duquesne."

Jadwin looked blank.

"Well, I'll bite," he admitted, finally. "Who's he?"

"They call me the king of the hijackers," proclaimed Monty slowly and with proud modesty. "I guess my mob has knocked off as many guys as the next. Wait! Hold it. I know what you're bu'sting to ask: What am I doing here? This happens to be on a covered wagon run that I was working to-night.

"A bunch of bulls or dry agents got on our trail. They got so hot that we ducked into the grounds here. I found this window open and slipped in with three of my deadshots. They've got you and your goof pal covered. So, if you want to look like a sieve, just try something.

"I'm not interested in queering your attempt to separate this sucker from his dough by selling him a string of five-and-ten pearls he thought belonged to this phony society queen you bunked him with. If I got your scenario right, I will take my split of that kale. But mostly I want to hide here now while the bulls are beating the bushes just outside."

"You say there are cops near?" breathed Jadwin, his worried look increasing.

"They were snooping around the grounds when I looked out last," Monty assured him. "They'll be at the door next to ask if we have seen anything of me. Put out that light."

Boldly, commandingly, he essayed a forward step. Abruptly he sensed a change in Jadwin's bearing. The doubt, hesitation, even fear had faded suddenly, and the pistol muzzle leaped up. Over the faces of Ruth and Kenyon flashed warnings that were too late.

Hands seized Monty's arms and pinned them against his back. The chauffeur who had driven Ruth there had slipped stealthily from behind the same curtain that had hidden Monty. Not at all muscular, Monty was held helpless by this big-shouldered, powerful-handed ruffian.

"I watched out, like you ordered," the driver reported to Jadwin. "Nobody stopped. Hearin' voices around here, I give a look and found this window door open. I climbs up and hears this gas bag giving you his bedtime stories. All boloney! They ain't no guys parked behind that curtain nor no cops prowling the yard. Apple butter."

"Speaking of 'surprise,'" mocked Jadwin, "how's that one?"

"Very good, Eddie, very good. The kid's clever, from the neck down," conceded Monty, from the depths of that vise-like grip which the driver had put on him by winding one gorillaesque arm about his

prisoner's trim chest. The fellow set the crushing fingers of his free hand around Monty's throat and tipped back his head.

"Shall I snap his neck?" he demanded in an emotionless voice. "One little tilt and—clicko!"

"No, no!" burst unexpectedly from the imitation butler. Ruth marveled at the paradoxical contrast, this shrinking from murder on the part of this coarse-faced ruffian, and the indifference about taking human life evinced by the dull, small-headed, heavy-shouldered moron. The butler's next words gave clew: "I've been up there. I've seen 'em go in. Not for mine."

"Choose your exit now—and don't pick the little green door that swings one way," advised Monty, referring to the death chamber. He scarcely could utter the flip-pant words, so tight was that iron grip on his throat. The butler was his one hope to gain time. "Don't forget that if you croak me, you'll have to snuff out the witnesses. And that means triple murder."

"We might as well make it sheep as lambs," countered Jadwin, hesitating nevertheless. "Wait a minute, Gyp. Don't pull anything until I say so. If we can't shut up these birds, we can knock 'em off."

"I came into this to turn a trick, not to risk the chair," complained Lunt.

"Listen, brother, you're putting yourself in the electric cooker for just nothing net," confided Monty, wheezing through his restricted windpipe. "Don't you know anything? This bimbo you thought you were taking in is Doc Kenyon, the notorious queer-shover. He thought he was putting over something on you—getting real pearls for a bale of phony kale. 'Queer.' Counterfeit, stupid."

Jadwin's face purpled and he appeared thunderstruck. In fierce doubt he swung about, glaring at Kenyon. The latter, dumfounded by Monty's charge and Jadwin's accusing stare, looked thoroughly guilty. Plainly Jadwin was puzzled for the moment.

"Strike a match and hold it where I can burn this mess of 'queer,'" he ordered Lunt.

The butler obeyed, extending a blazing match. Toward the flame Jadwin dipped a

loose-leaved handful of the orange-backed bills with their M's and C's.

As the fire was about to touch his crisp notes, a wrenched up groan drew all eyes to Kenyon who was staring with stricken gaze. Jadwin laughed triumphantly, and pocketed the money.

"King Solomon in a personal appearance, this performance only," sighed Monty. "Promise to kill him, and I'll die content."

"Tie and gag him before he can waste any more of our time," ordered Jadwin.

The chauffeur forced a handkerchief into Monty's mouth, effectually disarming him by silencing his one weapon. "You three submit quietly, and we'll leave you here to work yourselves loose."

Chauffeur and butler seemed to have enough stout rope to bind the prisoners. Just as Kenyon was being dumped on the floor beside Monty, Ruth wrenched out of Lunt's careless grip and although she was tied hand and foot, the girl dived at the telephone on the table. She butted over the instrument, knocking off the receiver.

"Good try," jeered Jadwin while his pals dragged her down. "Unfortunately it is disconnected and we cut the wire to make sure. And now, how to bump off this bunch without any noise to attract attention?"

He had tricked them into submitting, and now was going to kill them in spite of his assurance! Tentatively he aimed at Monty.

"No!—no croaking," whined Lunt, seizing his arm.

"I ain't wild to do it," admitted Jadwin. "But what can we do? Self-preservation. Let 'em live and they can point out our pictures at the gallery. Then—all the bulls knowing what mugs to look for."

"If being identified is all that's eatin' yuh, I can fix 'em," growled Gyp, the

chauffeur. "Fix 'em so they could stand in front of us and not be able to tell. Learned it in barroom rough'n' tumble. Take me thumb and gouge out their eyes. No croakin', no identifyin'. Watch me."

Abruptly he knelt on helpless, outstretched Monty. One great paw held Monty's head still in spite of his efforts to twitch it out of reach of that other hand, poised with its stubby thumb stiffened to form a scoop.

Defiant to the last, Monty stared up into the blank eyes of this emotionless brute, pitting his will against one too dull to feel his intangible resistance. That blinding thumb trembled for its swoop. Then—

Guns roared above voices. Blue-clad county police poured through the door. Gray-clad state troopers with hot revolvers sprang through the window. Cars, roaring into the driveway, erupted county detectives, sheriff's deputies, local police, private detectives.

"Where are the Marines?" demanded Monty when his gag was removed.

Jadwin and Lunt were 'cuffed together. Gyp lay groaning where he had been shot over. Kenyon was explaining unhappily. To Ruth, Monty presented an elderly, wiry and rumpled man who had entered.

"After following you here, I left my car down the road, slipped back and snooped for a way to get in to see if this was all as represented. Found a basement window forced. Inside I found this old chap, bound and gagged. The caretaker. They tied him up this afternoon. I slipped him out to call help while I held 'em. He didn't leave us much margin. I don't know if it was because he's so old and slow, or if he likes"—Monty grinned wanly—"dramatic suspense."

THE END



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CHANNING COMES THROUGH

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER, author of "Faro's Daughter," etc

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The Bronze Hand

By CAROLYN WELLS

Author of "More Lives Than One," "The Green Stain," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

M AISIE had her luncheon served in her cabin. She thought deeply while she was eating it, and when the waiter came in for the tray she was serene and smiling. She made a careful toilette, and put on a new frock that she hadn't before worn on board. It was a smart, rather daring, affair of white, faced here and there with orange, and a white steamer coat and hat with an orange scarf completed the costume.

She wore no jewelry of any sort, not even a ring, and no string of dangling beads or trumpery chains.

She went out to her own deck chair, confident that Trent would be sitting in his adjoining chair awaiting her.

He was; and as he sprang to his feet at

sight of her she smiled dazzlingly and said:

"Did you miss me from the dining room?"

"Yes, indeed," Trent replied. "It's always sunshine where you are, and darkness where you're not."

"How pretty!" and Maisie gave him a look of real affection that told him her lightness of tone was for the benefit of the passers-by.

As always after luncheon, the throngs swept by on their eternal round of the deck constitutional.

Nearly every one of them glanced curiously at Maisie, and after Trent had tucked up her rug, and she was ensconced in her chair as on a throne, she returned glance for glance. Not rudely, not staring, but showing apparently the same lively interest in them that they showed in her.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 31.

Trent watched her with satisfaction. He had implicit and unshakable faith in her, in every way. He believed that no wrong, no evil of any sort that might be mixed up in her life, was of her own making or brought about by her own hand or mind. Trent's creed was simple. It was of the "trust me not at all, or all in all" variety. So far, he trusted Maisie all in all. Should the time come when he must revise his opinion of her—well, that condition should be met when it arose.

But as he looked at the pure, sweet face, the straightforward, honest eyes, he could see no evil, hear no evil, think no evil of that queen of his heart. His deepest regret was his inability to help her. If he knew more, he felt sure he could do more. But the vague plans that came into his mind he dared not attempt, lest he harm her cause in his well-meant efforts to assist it. Without seeming to ask for more confidences than she had already vouchsafed, he told her this.

"I know it, dear," she said, the chattering crowds and the dash of the spray making their low voiced conversation unheard by others. "I know exactly what a difficult position I've placed you in. But I am in a quandary. And it's a sea of doubt which I must swim out of myself—or sink. No one can help me—you least of all. If I didn't care so much for you, I should just tell you all and throw the whole burden on your big, strong shoulders."

Maisie's face was wistful, her sad little smile was appealing, and Trent's self-control nearly gave way. As usual, he sought refuge in lightness.

"You are mysterious, my queen," he said, smiling. "Yet I love your mysteries better than other people's disclosures. Tell me more of them."

"Then here's a deep one. I shall probably be arraigned, and soon, at a court of justice, to be accused of—of dire misdeeds."

Maisie's smile was at variance with her words, it was almost roguish—and, sensitive to every play of light in her eyes, every quiver of her sensitive lips, Trent took heart from her tone, and said eagerly:

"I may go with you?"

"I don't see why not. Ah, here comes my little friend. Hello, Sally. Good afternoon, Mr. Abercrombie. Any more treasure hunts on the carpet?"

"No, Miss Forman," and the boy smiled at her. "We're going to have tableaux tonight. Will you take part?"

"Can't keep still long enough. But we'll be in the audience, Mr. Trent and I, and we'll promise to applaud the ones you want us to."

"Oh, do be in them, Maisie!" Sally cried, almost forgetting in the presence of this radiant being the angry, scornful person she had so lately "searched."

"What could I be?" Maisie dallied with the idea.

"Oh, you can be Romney's 'Girl With the Muff.' You look exactly like that! I never thought of it before, but you do! Doesn't she, Pup? Doesn't she, Mr. Trent?"

The mention of the word muff brought a look of startled agony to Maisie's face; but only for a moment, and no one but Trent saw it. Nor did he know the reason for it.

Then, laughingly, Maisie rolled up a corner of her rug, held it up to her face and, tilting her head sidewise, was such a perfect imitation of the picture in question that they all exclaimed in surprise and admiration.

"Oh, perfect!" screamed Sally. "You can fix up a costume out of a scarf or something; and I know where I can get the very right hat. Oh, will you, Maisie—will you?"

Passers-by now paused to see what the excitement was all about, and the Campers, coming along, stopped in front of Maisie's chair and smiled with the appearance of friendliness. The friendliness, however, was only in appearance, and veiled an intense curiosity.

"What! Miss Forman, are you thinking of going into the tableaux?" and Amy Camper's shrill voice carried a disagreeable note.

Maisie did not think of doing anything of the sort, but the unpleasant speech so irritated her that she felt impelled to retaliate.

"Why, I don't know," she said sweetly, "are you? Let's strike a bargain. I'll go into them if you will, Mrs. Camper. How's that?"

Now, Mrs. Camper hadn't been asked, and Maisie, although she didn't know, was pretty sure she hadn't. Amy Camper's pettish little face was not the sort most sought for the purposes of living pictures, while Maisie's expressive beauty was just what was desired.

"Oh, I shouldn't dream of it!" Mrs. Camper returned. "It's so—so public, don't you know. But you don't object to publicity?"

"No," said Maisie quietly. "I like it."

With the merest hint of a nod of dismissal Maisie turned to Trent, saying: "But as to that other matter—"

"Yes," said Trent, taking his cue instantly—"yes, I tell you it's the chance of a lifetime. Why, a man I know got rich overnight just by the investment of a small sum in it! It's a wonderful invention!"

"And it runs by electricity?" Maisie went on, suppressing her inclination to laugh at the Campers' tardy departure.

At last they went on along the deck, and Maisie gave way to her amusement.

"You're a brick, to pick up the chatter so beautifully! I hope I snubbed that fearful woman."

"It was a gentle little snub, dear, and I doubt if it penetrated her thick intelligence as such, but at least they did get away."

"Hello, girly, here's me!" and this time it was Lily Gibbs who bore down upon them.

Trent sprang up to give her his chair, which Miss Gibbs took with an air of proprietorship. So Trent sat down on the footrest of Maisie's chair, and in a few minutes Nash and Mallory, coming along, joined the group.

Sally and her wild horde ran back and forth, and the place became the center of interest.

Whatever the group that gathered round Maisie knew or surmised concerning her, they were one and all frankly under the spell of her charm.

The girl scintillated with wit and gayety,

she bubbled over with mirth and fun. She was gracious, cordial, whimsical and altogether enchanting.

Trent fell more deeply in love with her than ever, and Nash and Mallory looked at each other and shook their heads in negation of a girl like that being in any way a wrongdoer.

Lily Gibbs, seemingly forgetting the jewel episode, assumed an air of proprietorship in Maisie that would have been funny but that Maisie herself encouraged it and, with one hand on Lily's, continually turned to her for corroboration or approval of her chaff.

She paid no especial attention to Trent. Now and then she spoke laughingly to him, but for the most part her talk was a general bantering of Sally's crowd and the group in general.

Others, even strangers, were attracted, and stood along the rail, listening. Not that Maisie made herself at all conspicuous—on the contrary, her efforts were toward the drawing out of the others by her sallies and repartee.

Sherman Mason, strolling by, paused, and almost at the same moment Stanhope came along, and the two men met and smiled in unison, as Sally's shrieking laugh rang out.

"Fascinating little piece!" said Stanhope.

And Mason returned: "The Barnes baby? Yes, but I see no charm in flappers."

"Oh, they have a freshness—"

"You said it!" laughed Mason. "They have a freshness, and that's just what I object to."

"At least, it's a defect that time will remedy," said Stanhope good-naturedly. "I say, Mr. Mason, you've taken that man Hudder into your service. Did it ever strike you that he may have been the man in the library?"

"I have thought of that, Mr. Stanhope, and in fact that's one reason I took him on. Also the fact that he's a mighty good servant. Cox had him trained perfectly."

"And have you discovered anything—er—suspicious?"

"Well, I haven't had him twenty-four

hours yet, so one can't expect much. But as a matter of fact he seems to me faithful, doggedly—I guess I mean doggishly—so, like a dumb animal, you know.”

Mason was floundering a little, for which there seemed to be no reason unless it was that Stanhope looked at him so intently.

“Yes, he is almost dumb,” Mason went on. “He says next to nothing, and when I tried to quiz him a little about his late master he—he shut up like a clam.”

“Ah, a combination of the clam and the dog nature must combine to make a valuable servant. Where is the bronze hand now?”

“Heavens, I don't know!” and Mason looked as if the question amazed him. “I suppose the captain has it, or has it in custody. That's the weapon, isn't it? It must be given to the Scotland Yard people, mustn't it?”

“Are they going to put it all up to the Yard?”

“I believe so, as soon as we arrive in Liverpool.”

“Good business. It ought to be put in charge of the most competent hands. To my mind it is the most inexplicable murder I ever heard of! What do you say?”

“All murders are inexplicable to me.”

“Do you mean their solution, or that the mere fact of murder is to you inconceivable?”

“Both.” Sherman Mason gave a wry smile. “I say, Mr. Stanhope, you seem a bit of a detective—do you think the murder—the Cox murder—could by any possibility have been done by a woman?”

“So far as the physical force necessary is concerned, I should say yes. Women—girls, even, to-day—are often as muscular and forceful as men. They of course have less main strength, but to use that bronze hand as it was used could easily have been the act of a woman. Moreover, the diabolical cruelty of the mind that conceived that mode of killing, the cold brutality of the nature that could carry out the design, might be found in the female of the species, said, you know, to be more deadly than the male.”

“Yes. Yet it seems impossible for a woman—”

“The elemental passions know no sex. That murder was not only the result of a fierce fury, an implacable hate, but it was planned by a cool head and carried out with a steady hand.”

“Yes—a hand of bronze!”

Stanhope did not smile at the gruesome jest, but went on:

“That's why I hesitate to deduce a feminine will back of it. It seems to me a woman could do all that—could claw her victim with that awful instrument in the heat of passion or outraged feelings—but I can't see her planning it ahead, watching her chance and then striking so coolly.”

“How do you know the stroke was made coolly?”

“Because it hit so true. You know, I have examined the dead man, and I could distinguish the marks of two blows—there were two blows, clawing, dragging blows—”

“Oh, hush! How can you rehearse such fearful details?” Mason put a hand over his eyes for a moment, as if to shut out the awful picture Stanhope conjured up.

“Forgive me, Mason. I didn't realize how graphic I was.”

“Oh, that's all right—I'm not squeamish; only, it was a terrible thing!”

And then Stanhope's quick eye caught sight of an unobtrusive messenger, who came and spoke a word or two to Miss Forman.

“Certainly,” she said, with what seemed to him like a little sigh of relief.

She arose and nodded invitingly to Trent, who went along with her.

Without a word Stanhope followed.

“Miss Forman,” he said, as he caught up with her, “you're going to see the captain?”

“Yes,” she said, speaking coldly, but smiling more amiably as she noticed his pleasant, kindly expression and earnest gaze.

“May I go with you? I may be of real assistance to you.”

His low, deep tones sounded a note of sincerity and hope, and the girl quickly responded to it.

“I should be glad to have you, Mr. Stanhope,” she said. “It is perhaps a—a sort of crisis.”

"Yes," he said understandingly, and, dropping behind them, he followed her and Trent to the room appointed.

Captain Van Winkle looked a little surprised as he saw Maisie enter with the two men.

"I had expected you alone, Miss Forman," he said gravely.

"I know, captain, but do you mind if I bring these two friends?"

"Not at all—if you don't object to their hearing what I have to say."

"No, I don't object." Maisie, looking charmingly care-free and light-hearted, seated herself in the chair the captain held for her.

Indeed, so serene and pleasant was her attitude that the captain felt suddenly a great distaste for the ordeal before him. But he never flinched from a duty, and he plunged at once into the subject.

"I'm sorry, Miss Forman," he said, with real regret in his tones, "but I have to ask you some questions."

"Of course you have, captain—go right ahead. I'm here to answer them."

The three men looked at her. Captain Van Winkle felt real relief that she was taking it thus lightly, instead of being sulky—or, worse, tearful.

Stanhope had an intense interest to hear the coming conversation, and was full of earnest hope that he might be able to help this beautiful girl out of whatever meshes of circumstance might yet involve her. Trent, with ever growing love and trust, with steadfast loyalty, with no doubts of his Maisie, but with a wary eye out for any danger that might assail her, had a ready will to do anything in his power to aid her should such a chance be given him.

"You see, Miss Forman, we are trying to find a number of pieces of valuable jewelry that we have reason to believe were stolen from the effects of Mr. Oscar Cox either before or after his untimely death."

"Yes," said Maisie, and the word was absolutely without inflection of any sort. But it seemed to be a gracious permission to proceed.

The captain, detesting his task more and more, floundered on:

"And we—we had reason—or thought we had—to suspect—that is, to think they might be in your possession. And"—he rushed it through now—"and so we asked two ladies to—er—investigate. And they said—"

"Yes?"

This time the inflection was slightly interrogatory.

"They said you had the jewels."

"Why did they think they were the Cox jewels that they found in my possession?"

"Because there were five pieces which corresponded exactly with the jewels listed on Mr. Cox's bills. These pieces of jewelry were not found in his effects, and we feel justified in assuming that they are the pieces you have. Can you assure me they are not?"

"I can most certainly assure you, Captain Van Winkle, on my honor, that I have no jewelry in my possession at this moment that is not absolutely and unquestionably my own property."

"Then you've thrown it overboard."

"I have thrown overboard no bit or piece of property that was not my very own."

"You were seen to fling far out to sea something that sparkled like gold."

"Yes."

"Was it gold?"

"Captain Van Winkle, have you the right to ask me these questions?"

Maisie did not seem embarrassed so much as perplexed. She asked her question straightforwardly, and the captain answered as directly.

"Yes, Miss Forman, I have. It is not at all an easy thing for me to do, to quiz you thus, but I have the right, and, moreover, it is my duty. So I ask you to explain why you would throw away valuable jewelry?"

"It wasn't of great value"—she spoke a bit reminiscently—"it was only a ring, and not a very expensive ring at that. I threw it away because I didn't want it. In fact, I never liked it!"

This last bit of information came with a sort of burst of confidence and was accompanied by an irradiating smile that

showed a trace of mischievousness, almost as if a naughty child had been caught in an act of disobedience.

"And that was all you threw overboard? We were not interested in a ring. There is no ring in question."

"Yes, that's all I threw overboard, captain."

"How well did you know Mr. Cox?"

"He was introduced to me after I came on board the Pinnacle."

"He admired you?"

Maisie stared at him. "If he did, he didn't say so. I saw him to speak to only a few times, and then he was most formal and conventional in his conversation."

"Yet I am told he threatened, jestingly, to throw you overboard."

"Throwing things overboard seems to be a habit on this boat. But I suppose no more so than on others. I never look over the rail but I have the impulse to pitch something in."

Stanhope chuckled to himself. He was enjoying this conversation and was rather pleased at the girl's attitude. It seemed to him she was sparring for time, and yet, he wondered, what help would delay give her? Also, he thought, if he were in the captain's place he would bring that inquiry to a head with a few sudden turns and find out where things really stood.

Trent, still watchful of the course of events, still mutely adoring his goddess, sat silently by, contented to remain in the dark as long as Maisie chose to keep him there.

The captain sighed and began again. The poor man was out of his element, but he had to carry on, and he struggled afresh with his waning courage.

"What I mean is, Miss Forman, that a man wouldn't jestingly threaten to throw a lady overboard unless he was pretty well acquainted with the lady. It is not a joke a stranger would make."

"Isn't it, captain?"

"No; that is, it doesn't seem so to me. Therefore I am assuming that you knew Mr. Cox better than you have given me reason to suppose."

"Well, I can tell you frankly that I did not think I knew him well enough to have

him speak to me in that jesting way. I certainly did not. But as he did speak so, as he did say that very thing, I simply assumed that his idea of joking with a lady and mine differed, and I let it go at that. You must see that I couldn't openly resent the speech; that would have seemed to attach too much importance to it, and I didn't really consider it important at all. In fact, I promptly forgot it. But I didn't see Mr. Cox again to speak to—at least I don't think I did."

"Not when you visited him in his state-room?"

"You have been told that I did that?"

"Yes. Do you deny it?"

"I neither deny nor admit it. But I do deny your right to ask me about it. I think, as you say, you have certain rights in this inquiry, but I claim that question is outside your right. What is your opinion, Mr. Stanhope?"

It was the first time Maisie had spoken to any one except the captain, but Stanhope's attention was so earnest, his expression so eager, that Maisie wanted him to speak.

"I think, Miss Forman, that Captain Van Winkle is entirely within his rights in asking you anything that bears on the subject of Mr. Cox, his affairs or his death, and if I may advise you, it is to be utterly and entirely frank."

Then Maisie Forman turned white—not only pale, but a chalky, deathly white, that made Max Trent fear she was going to faint. But she did not. She gripped the arms of the chair she sat in, and said, in a very low voice: "Go on, captain."

The captain was shrewd enough to press this advantage.

"Where are jewels?" he said abruptly.

"Here they are," said Maisie Forman, and drawing a small jewel bag from the handbag she carried, she poured forth upon the table a string of pearls with a square diamond clasp, a shoulder buckle set with precious stones, and three diamond bangle bracelets.

"Those are the Cox jewels?" said the captain, his voice a bit unsteady.

"They are mine."

"You—you took them from Mr. Cox—"

"I did not. He gave them to me."

"He gave them to you—why did he give you such a gift?"

"Because—" Maisie's beautiful eyes fell at last, and her voice was a mere whisper as she said:

"Because I was—his wife."

CHAPTER XVI.

ENTER FLEMING STONE.

TO say Maisie's hearers were thunder-struck at her words, would be putting it very mildly.

Captain Van Winkle looked utterly blank and stared at her with a vacant gaze as if she had spoken in a language not known to him.

Stanhope stared, too, but his face showed not only intelligent understanding of her words, but his alert eyes and quick play of expression showed his thoughts were racing and he was weighing the meaning and consequences of what the girl had just disclosed.

As for Trent, he was almost comical in his bewilderment. Perhaps of all the astounding things Maisie could have said, this was the most bewildering and incredible.

Maisie, Cox's wife! Impossible! It just simply couldn't be!

Then as Trent looked at her, and saw her sweet mouth droop and noted the misery in her eyes, he realized that at last his time had come to help, or at least to stand by.

He moved his chair nearer to hers, and taking her hand in his, said clearly and distinctly:

"This lady is my *fiancée*, and whatever further is to be said to her, must be said in my presence—and said carefully."

This gave Captain Van Winkle another shock, and he struggled hard to keep his poise.

Then Stanhope intervened.

"We have reached a crisis," he said, slowly, "and since revelations seem to be in order, I think it is the time for me to make one. My name is not Stanhope. I am using that alias for reasons of my own. But I am Fleming Stone, the detective, and I offer

you my services, Captain Van Winkle, trusting you may be able to make use of them. I have been exceedingly interested in this Cox affair from the start, and, though I have kept quiet in the matter, I think I know all the details that have been brought to light."

Captain Van Winkle turned to the speaker as a drowning man to a lifeboat.

"Are you really Fleming Stone? Sir, I am glad indeed to have your help. I know nothing of detective work. This murder is too great, too terrible for amateurish sleuths to take care of. I so longed for a real, an experienced detective, and now you are here! Please, Mr. Stone, if you will, take the case in hand, do whatever you choose, use your own methods, but I hope you can apprehend the murderer, or at least get some definite evidence before we land at Liverpool."

"We're due Sunday morning," Stone ruminated, "and it's Friday now. Something less than forty-eight hours. But if I can solve the mystery at all, I can do it in that time. At any rate, the murderer is on board, and two days ought to give me time to smoke him out."

"And now, Miss Forman—er—Mrs. Cox," the captain said, still looking bemused and bewildered, "have you anything to add to your statement—your rather surprising statement?"

"Yes," Maisie said, quietly, "I have. I should like to tell you men briefly the circumstances that led to my sailing under the name of Miss Forman."

"We should be glad to hear anything you care to tell us," the captain said, having regained his manners if not his mental balance."

But if truth were told the other two listeners were even more eager to hear the girl's story, and Trent, looking like a man who was keying his nerve up to highest pitch, forced himself to sit quietly and await calmly the coming revelation.

Fleming Stone, his dark, deep-set eyes somber with the gravity of the occasion, watched Maisie, without seeming to do so, and waited for her to speak.

"Without going into all the details," she began, "and without mentioning names, un-

less necessary, I will tell you that my father, one of the most upright and honorable men in the world, was made the tool and the catspaw of a company of shrewd and unscrupulous swindlers. Perhaps swindlers is too strong a word, but that is what it amounted to. I can't tell you the particulars, for I don't know enough about business and all that. But it was the Apollonia Mine, and it was a fake.

"They were what you call, I think, crooked promoters, and they inveigled my father into buying the thing, because he had some knowledge of mines and ores that they wished to use. Well, anyway, they hoodwinked him into thinking the company was all right and honest and all that, and when he discovered they were all wrong, he declared he would show them up.

"I can't tell you exactly what happened, but they had so fixed things that my father would be arrested and put in prison for life, if he exposed them. They had fixed everything so that dad was the scapegoat, and the whole blame would rest on his innocent shoulders. He tried every way to arrange things so that they should bear their own share of the blame, he was willing enough to take his own share, which was nothing compared to the terrible schemes of those villains. But he couldn't get at them, legally, and when he tried, they said they would jail him anyway, for he was too dangerous a man to be at large.

"All these things you men can verify, by asking the lawyers. I can't tell this part of the story as it should be told. But here's where I come in. Oscar Cox was one of the principal men in the company, and he was the worst enemy father had. If Cox would agree not to make trouble for dad, the others would do as he said.

"And so," here Maisie blushed and looked a little embarrassed, "Mr. Cox happened to take a fancy to me—and he told father that if—if I would marry him, there would be no further mention of dad's name with the scandal of the mine business. But if I would not, then he would break my father. That's the word he used, and he meant it in its widest, fullest sense.

"He meant to ruin my father utterly, blast his reputation, take away all his prop-

erty and land him in prison for a long term. I can't tell you of all the plans he had made and traps he had laid, but everything was ready to fall on father and crush him utterly—unless—unless I married Oscar Cox."

"You poor darling," Trent murmured, holding Maisie's hand more closely, as he looked at her with troubled eyes.

"I had no choice," the girl said, simply. "I would have married anybody on earth rather than see my loved father the victim of those men's cruelty. It wasn't only Mr. Cox, there were others. I don't even know the names of some of them. A Mr. Frey seemed to be one of the worst."

"Ellison Frey?" said Stone. "Yes. I know who he is."

"Well, anyway, I not only had to agree to marry Mr. Cox, but I had to pretend to father that I wanted to marry him. Ugh!" she gave a shiver of disgust.

"So, this is what I did. I told Oscar Cox that I would marry him on one condition. That was, that we should be married Saturday morning, that we should sail on this boat Saturday afternoon, but that after the ceremony, he should not consider me his wife, or even seem to be acquainted with me, until we landed in Liverpool.

"I stipulated that I should sail under my maiden name, and that he should pretend we were strangers all the way across. He agreed to this more willingly than I anticipated, for he said it meant only about a week of waiting and he should have me under his eye all the time.

"He looked forward with pleasure to the ocean trip, and I—well, my plan was to gain time to think things over, and if I found I just simply couldn't stand the idea of being married to him, to throw myself overboard. This I tried to do."

"Thank Heaven, I was there!" breathed Trent, fervently.

"Then he bought the jewels for you?" the captain said.

"Yes—you see they have my initials on the back—very small—E. M. C. My name is Elizabeth Mary, and—I suppose it is Cox."

"That explains the E. M. C. on the beautiful gold-fitted dressing-case. That was doubtless meant as a present to you."

"Yes," Maisie sighed. "He told me he had ordered it. You see, I didn't see him at all after the ceremony. I went straight back home with father. Then I came to the steamer alone at sailing time. Of course, I had my passport made out in my maiden name, which was my name when I went for the passport. And, of course, all my luggage bore my own initials and all that. He gave me the jewels the moment after I became his wife, and I put them in my bag. I wore the pearls, but the other things I had never taken out of their cases, until—"

"Never mind, dear," said Trent, seeing her agitation at the remembrance.

"Well, that's about all," Maisie said; "then, then—" she smiled bravely, "then I met Mr. Trent, and we both knew at once, that we cared for each other. So, there was nothing for me to do but to jump overboard. I tried to do so, and Mr. Trent saved me. I had no idea he was there. I couldn't see him, and I thought there was nobody about.

"Then—Mr. Cox was—was killed. I suppose it's very wicked, but I was glad! Yes, glad. I threw my wedding ring overboard, and that's what the stewardess or somebody saw sparkle as it fell."

"You have your wedding certificate?" asked Fleming Stone, who was deeply pondering the story as it was unrolled to him.

"Yes; though I wish I need never make it public. I mean, I wish it need not be known that I was his wife. Must it?"

"No—" began Trent, but Stone interrupted him.

"It need not be told to the whole passenger list, perhaps," he said; "but it is not a matter that can be kept entirely secret. You forget we have yet to find the murderer of Oscar Cox. Miss Forman—for I for one, shall continue to call you by that name—"

"Oh, please do," begged Maisie. "I should die if I had to be called Mrs. Cox!"

"Miss Forman, then, have you any idea who could have done the deed?"

"Not the slightest," and Maisie looked straight into his eyes. "No, Mr. Stone, I have no idea. The only one I can think of is Hudder, and I have no real reason to suspect him."

"It may easily be that Cox had enemies on board of whom we know nothing," Trent offered. "Just think of the scores of men who have never taken part in the smoking room discussions, and never evinced any interest or expressed any opinions on the case. If one of those had killed Cox, that's just the way he would carry it off."

"Yes," said Stone, "you're doubtless right. Unless he were shrewd enough to see that such a course is really more open to suspicion than to join in the gossip."

"In either case there are too many such men, I mean possible suspects, with not a vestige of evidence to point their way."

"Mr. Trent," Stone said, looking at him, "you are interested in detective work, I know. Will you help me, and perhaps together we can solve the mystery of Cox's terrible death?"

"Yes, I will," Trent responded. "I admit that I felt inclined to keep away from the investigation when I saw how Miss Forman was getting mixed up in the jewel matter. But now that is all cleared up, I am ready to do all I can to track down the criminal."

"Will you tell us now, Miss Forman, what you meant by the code words you sent to your father?"

"I have no reason for concealing anything, now," said Maisie with a sigh of relief. "Now that my only secret, that of my marriage is known, I have no further secrets to hide. Yes, captain, I will tell you. I don't know where it originated, but it was the habit among the men to call Mr. Cox 'Behold.' It was because his initials O. C. sounded like 'Oh, see!' or behold. Anyway he was called Behold by all who knew him intimately.

"Now, I knew my father would learn of his death at once, through the New York newspapers. I did not know what to do about my own journey, so I wirelessly father to the effect that Behold was no more, and what should I do, go on or go back. He replied for me to return to New York as soon as possible—but," here Maisie blushed distractingly, "but by that time Mr. Trent and I had come to care so much for each other that I didn't want to go back."

"But I'm going back with you, dear—"

unless we go on, and stay in England for a time," Trent said.

"I'm not sure our private affairs interest these gentlemen," and Maisie smiled "But—" and immediately her face grew serious again; "but I'll tell you one thing. If it becomes known that I was—was married to Mr. Cox, I am the one who is going to be suspected of his—murder."

"Maisie! No!" Trent cried, but Fleming Stone said:

"Yes, Miss Forman, you are quite right. And, I'm sorry, but I scarcely think it can be kept secret. Remember, you are even now suspected of having stolen those valuable pieces of jewelry. To clear yourself of that charge, you will have to admit they were given to you. This will necessitate a true statement of the situation, or—you will be supposed to have accepted those gems from one who was merely a friend at most, and apparently, on your own showing, a stranger!"

"It is a problem," said the girl, thoughtfully. "But I did not kill Mr. Cox, and I do want the murderer, whoever he is, brought to justice."

"What is your opinion and advice, Mr. Stone?" the captain asked. He had recovered his natural poise, but he still felt shaken, as a man who has been through a sort of mental cyclone.

"My opinion is, that Miss Forman will most certainly be looked at askance. The truth itself is sensational, to say the least, and the exaggerated reports which it will engender will be a dozen times worse! I am not an alarmist, but that is the way I see it, and I want Miss Forman to be forewarned, and therefore forearmed."

"And I shall be, Mr. Stone," Maisie's head went up proudly. "If I followed my inclinations, I would go into my cabin and stay there until we land in Liverpool. But my father brought me up to face the music—always. I have done nothing wrong. My marriage to Oscar Cox was solely and only to save my father's reputation and life—for imprisonment would have killed him, I am sure of that.

"I willingly made the sacrifice for him, but when I found that my own death would be preferable to life with that man, I at-

tempted to bring it about. It could not have nullified the sacrifice I made, for Mr. Cox had arranged the business matters so that my father could never be blamed in any way for what the company had done. This was his price for me and he had paid it. So if I chose to drown rather than live with him, it was no one's business but my own."

"Then when Mr. Cox laughingly said he'd throw you overboard, he knew what you had tried to do?"

"He must have overheard Mr Trent referring to it that next day. He wanted me to know he had heard, and he chose to make that jest so I would realize that he owned me, and could, if he chose, throw me overboard. It was a poor and ill-timed joke, but that was his idea, I'm sure."

"And you went to his room one night?" The captain was himself again and asking his own questions.

"Yes. I had a right to do so—I was his wife. I went to beg him to release me. To try to persuade him to set me free. But I might as well have asked the gale to stop blowing. He tried to keep me with him then, but I reminded him of his solemn agreement not to molest me in any way during the trip across. So he only said, 'Very well, my lady; wait till I get you in Liverpool!' And so repulsive was he and so impossible, that I made up my mind never to reach Liverpool."

Maisie's voice was steady, and her statements straightforward. She spoke frankly, and her words carried the ring of truth.

"Then you must have been—pardon my plain speaking—you must have been glad when Mr. Cox was—was out of your way."

The captain stammered a little, but he never could quite overcome his suspicion of the feminine nature, and he felt he must sound the girl as to this.

"Captain Van Winkle," Maisie said. "I cannot truthfully deny that I am glad Oscar Cox is, as you put it, out of my way. But that does not prevent my deep regret at the manner of his passing, or lessen my horror of the dreadful deed that brought about my freedom from that man. He was a bad man, a very bad man, as you can all learn from people who really knew him. But I would not rejoice at the death of the

worst man in the world, if it had to come in such a dreadful way."

"Of course, you wouldn't, Miss Forman," Stone said, kindly. "Then, as I see it, you propose to 'face the music' and take your usual place on the deck and in the dining room?"

"Yes, Mr. Stone. I am not afraid. There is no use in advertising my own private and personal affairs, but in so far as they must be made public I am willing to accept the situation. Do you think you can clear me from the accusation of having killed Mr. Cox, or must I wait for the Scotland Yard investigation?"

"That is what I'm thinking about," the detective returned, very soberly. "Miss Forman, did—or does—anybody on board know of your marriage to Mr. Cox? How about that man named Hudder? Can he know of it?"

"I don't know about Hudder. I've no idea whether he knows it or not. I fancy not, for Mr. Cox promised to tell no one, and I believe he meant to keep his word."

"Then, unless he told Hudder, no one knows it?"

Maisie hesitated, then she sighed.

"I am resolved, Mr. Stone, to keep nothing back. I mean to tell you everything and anything I possibly can that may bear on this case. And so, I must tell you that Mr. Mason knows about it."

"Sherman Mason!"

"Yes, he told me so. I don't know whether Mr. Cox told him or how he learned it, but he told me he knew what happened on Saturday morning before I left New York."

"How did he come to tell you this?"

Again Maisie flushed with embarrassment.

"I seem to be obliged to confess to many unpleasantnesses," she said smiling a little. "But the truth is, Mr. Mason informed me that I was, as he expressed it, in deep waters, and the only way out was for me to marry him. I'm sorry to be obliged to relate so many of my matrimonial opportunities, but it is true."

"Mr. Mason then told me that he knew of—he did not say my marriage to Mr. Cox. He didn't even mention Mr. Cox's

name—but he said he knew the circumstances, and he knew the arrangement under which I was crossing. Of course, he meant the agreement that Mr. Cox and I should appear as strangers on the way over. He said that he wanted to marry me, and he said too, that very few men would be willing to marry me, knowing about Mr. Cox."

At this Trent swore under his breath, but said no word aloud.

"What did you say to him?" Stone inquired, almost casually.

"I wanted to say that very few would be enough!" Maisie dimpled and smiled. "But I didn't. I didn't really feel in a jesting mood. I simply told him that I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man on earth! Then I left him."

"Is Mason, by any chance, mixed up in this business affair that affected your father so disastrously?"

"I don't think so. I never heard of Mr. Mason until I came on board. But he must have known of it through Mr. Cox, or in some way, for he seemed to know of the Apollonia Mine, though I merely mentioned it. I don't know, Mr. Stone, whether or not he is in the combine, or whatever they call it, but I think not. For when he asked me to marry him, he said he knew father, and that dad would look on him favorably as a son-in-law. He didn't use those words, but he conveyed that idea."

"Look here," Trent said, suddenly. "What was that message Mason sent, that used the word behold as a code word?"

"That's so," said the captain, and looked up his records. "Here you are. 'Behold nothing off to Italy take muff.'"

"Aha," Stone said, "then Mason knew Cox well enough to call him by that nickname. For that message was sent the day Cox died. Surely it means that now Cox is dead, or is nothing, he, Mason will go to Italy and take whatever the word muff stands for. To whom is the message?"

"Ellison Frey!"

"Oh," Maisie exclaimed, "he is one of the men mixed up in that Apollonia scheme."

"Then Mason didn't kill Cox—he was on his side," Stone suggested.

"Oh, no, of course Mr. Mason didn't kill

Mr. Cox! Why, as I see it, Mr. Mason and Mr. Cox and this Mr. Frey were all banded together and all against my father. Whatever they were, they were partners. And I think I remember Mr. Frey as an elegant gentleman and seemingly rather more friendly to dad than the others."

"Where did you meet any of these men?"

"I didn't exactly meet them—but a few times they have come to see dad in the evening, and if the maid was out, I would take wine and cakes in for them. They never spoke to me, but perhaps the next day I might ask father who this or that one was. Mr. Cox I saw several times. Mr. Mason I never saw. I don't know whether he ever came or not. But I do remember Mr. Frey."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Stone said. "Now, Miss Forman I think you need a rest. Why don't you go to your room until tea time and then make your appearance on deck with your colors flying?"

"I'll be on deck at tea time, all right," Maisie promised him, but she didn't agree to the plan of going to her room.

Instead, she went with Max Trent, straight to their own corner on the upper deck.

With one accord, they went to the rail, where Trent had saved her life that memorable night.

"Darling," he said, as they stood side by side there, "I knew I loved you, but I didn't half know what a brick you are, nor how much you had to bear. My blessed little girl, why didn't you confide in me sooner?"

"Oh, I couldn't, Max. I didn't know how you'd take it. And, too, every day seemed to bring some new development. Why, I didn't know but I'd be in irons, down in some dungeon in the hold—or wherever the dungeons are! And I don't know yet but I shall! Isn't it strange, Max, that that Stanhope man should turn out to be Fleming Stone?"

"It's fine! Why, he's the greatest private detective in the U. S. A. I'd rather he'd be on this case than all Scotland Yard put together. But, dear heart, there may be trouble ahead. I don't know what it

will be, but I can see that Mr. Stone is far from easy about things. So I want to beg you, dearest, don't have any more secrets from me. Tell me everything as soon as you learn of it yourself. You are mine, you know, all mine—"

"And you don't mind that I—"

"Maisie, if you ever so much as mention that man's name to me—I'll—"

"Well, what will you do?"

"I'll call him your first husband! So there now!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MAISIE IN DANGER.

FLEMING STONE was not easy in his mind—far from it. In his opinion the trouble was not lessened by Maisie's confession. It was rather increased. Since she had been the wife of Oscar Cox, she was now his widow, and that was a fact of grave importance. She was heir to his fortune—and a considerable one, Stone deemed it to be. She was the legal possessor of all his property, not only by law of inheritance, but, as Stone had heard, a will devised everything of which Cox died possessed to his wife.

But, Stone reflected, all this was outside his jurisdiction. Those matters must be taken up with Cox's lawyer, of course. The girl ought to go straight back to New York and attend to it.

But, and here was the thought that was pushing Fleming Stone, was she—could she be implicated in the murder?

Although greatly prepossessed in Maisie's favor, the detective could not overlook the palpable truth that she had had motive and opportunity. She hated Cox and she was in love with Trent. She was of an impulsive and daring nature. She was willing to take her own life rather than live with Cox. Would she not then even take his life for the sake of being free to marry Trent?

The horror of the idea, the apparent impossibility of that lovely girl pursuing such a terrible course, did not strike Stone as forcibly as it would strike one less experienced in crimes.

He had known lovely, angelic-faced women before who had proved to be perfect devils, capable of the most ghastly crime.

And the more he thought it over, the more he could see how Maisie could have done it. He had studied closely the reports of the whereabouts of the passengers at the hour the crime was committed. He knew that some time during that half hour Maisie had left her chair, gone to her room for a book and then proceeded down to the dining room, getting there, he had learned from her table steward, a good bit late.

Now, Cox's room was very near Maisie's and at that time all the stewardesses and stewards were looking over the stair rail or getting any post of vantage they might, to see the gay doings of the Fourth of July celebration. Therefore, Maisie could have gone to Cox's room entirely unnoticed, could have picked up the bronze hand from his table and, returning the way she came, could have slipped into the library, deserted, of course, for the moment, and could have leaned out of the window directly back of Cox's chair and with a swift, sharp, well aimed blow could have left the wounds which Stone had so carefully examined on the face of the dead man.

He had not the slightest doubt but that the crime had been committed in just that way, but many people beside Maisie Forman had the opportunity.

Now, the question was, who else had a motive?

So far as Stone knew, nobody. He dismissed the thought of Hudder. Unless for some secret reason of hate or revenge, the man had no motive to kill a master who was kind and generous to him. Moreover, he was pretty well certain that Hudder was engaged in assisting preparations for Cox's lunch. Although not elaborate, the midday meal of Oscar Cox, was always prepared with the greatest care on the part of the deck steward, the specially chosen waiter, and Hudder himself.

And then Stone's thoughts flew to Cox.

What a strange man he was. And to think of his being really the husband of that lovely girl, who was his unwilling wife.

The detective admired Maisie, but felt that he knew her very slightly. He had had so little social life on board that he knew few people. He was engaged on a secret mission, of which the ocean crossing represented but a small part, and he had time enough to take up this case of the Cox murder, if he chose so to do.

And he was inclined toward it, until he thought it all over and began to see that the tide of suspicion would inevitably turn in the girl's direction as soon as the sensational facts became known. Yet they had to become known. Maisie was Cox's wife, and that could not be kept secret. Even if those who already knew it agreed not to tell, it wouldn't be right to countenance such secrecy.

And, too, if the girl was entirely innocent the real murderer must be found, and this could only be done by accepting and acknowledging the actual conditions.

The more Stone thought about it, the more he felt that Maisie should have a lawyer. She was too ignorant of business matters to take care of her own interests. There was a big estate to be adjusted, and although the Cox lawyers would attend to everything, once the heiress was back in New York, yet she needed somebody at once to advise her in legal matters and protect her interests.

Max Trent, although her *fiancé*, was no sort of business man, and while he would fight for her, if necessary, he could be of no use in legal matters.

Stone made up his mind he would tell Maisie all this, and then he cast about for the right man to recommend. He felt sure Maisie would employ any one he suggested, and the first one that came into his mind was Sherman Mason.

Here was a wise, competent man of the world, and although Maisie had said he wanted to marry her, perhaps that was an argument in favor of his being her legal adviser.

Then, too, he seemed to know all about her strange marriage, and his familiarity with conditions would certainly be helpful. If he chose to renew his proposal of marriage, that matter was in the girl's hands. If, as she said, she was already engaged

to Trent, then Mason would, perforce, step aside, but he seemed a man who would do all he could for the lady, even if denied her favor.

Stone concluded to sound him out at least, and went in search of him. Mason was in the smoking room, and Stone asked him to come with him to sit in a side alcove, and over a highball and a cigar discuss the question of the day.

"Are you especially interested, Mr. Stanhope?" Mason asked.

"Yes, I am," Stone replied. He had decided not to divulge his identity unless inquired of, and then not to deny it. "You see, I'm by way of being a bit of a detective, and the captain has asked me to do what I can. Now, I've just learned the astonishing news that the young lady we call Miss Forman was—but I think you know—"

"Yes, I know," and Mason looked the detective squarely in the eye. "How did you learn it?"

"The lady told us herself."

"Let's have no mistake, now. The lady in question told you that—the relationship she bore to Oscar Cox?"

"Yes. She said she was his wife."

Sherman Mason looked thunderstruck. Not at the news, he knew that before, but at the announcement that Maisie had told it.

"How did you know it?" Stone asked.

"Cox told me himself—in a moment of confidence. He was crazy over the girl, and was gleefully looking forward to the end of the voyage when he could openly claim her as his wife."

"He seemed to be having a contented and happy time on board."

"Yes, that was Oscar Cox's way. He liked young people, and he had promised not to speak to his wife, save as a casual acquaintance, all the way over. So he just made the best of it, and played round with the youngsters to pass the time away."

"I see. And she—didn't care for him."

"Well, I don't know much about that, but she couldn't have been deeply in love with him, or she never would have made such a stipulation. Then, too, she tried to drown herself, rather than live with him."

"Did she, really? Wasn't that a bit of theatricalism?"

"I don't think so."

"Do you know her well, Mr. Mason?"

"Never saw her until I met her on this boat."

"Yet she says you have asked her to marry you."

Sherman Mason smiled. "Mr. Stanhope, I am, naturally a squire of dames. A woman in distress appeals to my chivalry always. Especially if she is young and pretty, as Miss Forman certainly is. So I did offer her marriage, and I stand by my offer, if she cares to accept it. But while I would gladly marry her, I will tell you, it was more as an act of protection to a young woman dangerously alone, than an affair of pure romance."

"She is dangerously alone, Mr. Mason, you have chosen just the right phrase. She is engaged to Mr. Trent, but though he adores her he is in no sense a man of legal knowledge or business experience. He is a writer of stories, and has that detached mentality that goes with the artistic temperament. Now, I'm wondering if your chivalry would urge you to help this young woman through until she can get in touch with some lawyers, either already in charge of her husband's legal affairs, or ready to become so."

"Why, Mr. Stanhope, I'd be glad to do anything I could, of course. But—I did not know Oscar Cox well enough to butt in on his estate or its settlement. I have heard there is a will—"

"Yes, an informal affair leaving everything to his wife. So Miss Forman, as I shall continue to call her, is really a very great heiress."

"Can she not go right back home, and take up the whole thing with the Cox administrators or executors—there must be some firm at the helm."

"But, you see—" Stone looked steadily at him, "there is yet the matter of finding the murderer of Oscar Cox."

"Oh, that of course. But what has the girl to do with that?"

"Don't you see—hasn't it struck you, that with this fortune willed to her, and having fallen in love, practically at sight,

with another man—don't you see, that it was greatly to Miss Forman's advantage to—to have Oscar Cox out of her way?"

"Good heavens, man!" and Mason looked genuinely startled, "are you—you can't be accusing—"

"Murders have been committed by women—or by their tools," said Stone quietly. "While I make no accusations, I do say the thing is not impossible, and I am sure it will be voiced as a suspicion as soon as these marriage details become known."

"Must they become known?"

"Mr. Mason, justice must have its way. If the young lady is guilty, even as accessory, it must be discovered. And discoveries cannot be made if previous evidence is hidden."

"But—but it is so unthinkable! So incredible! That lovely girl—"

"But that lovely girl has a strong, an impulsive nature. Think! She consented to marry a man she loathed. She tried to commit suicide to get away from him. She fell in love with another man and agreed, as soon as her legal husband was dead, to marry him. Now I admit that she is a lovely girl, but she is not a simple-minded young miss. She is a far-seeing woman of strong passions and indomitable courage."

"I suppose you're trying to prove that she could have killed that man had she chosen to do so."

"Yes, without making any accusation, that is what I suggest. And so, I say that she needs somebody to advise her, some one with legal experience and worldly knowledge. I thought of you first, because you are more or less conversant with the conditions, but if you prefer not to get mixed up in the affair, you've only to say so, and I'll ask some one else."

Sherman Mason thought for a moment. Then he said; "Just who is at the head of all this? To whom do you report? To whom shall I report, if I look after Miss Forman's interests?"

Stone stared at him. "I thought everybody knew there is no judge, no court on a liner, except the captain. He is the head of all inquiries, of all investigations. To him we all make our reports, and as to the

murder case, when we reach Liverpool he will turn it all over to the C. I. D. Scotland Yard will take hold of it, and will do what they choose in regard to the American police. You, of course, would make your reports to the executors of the Cox estate on your return or Miss Forman's return to New York."

"I see. Well, Mr. Stone, I will do what I can. By that I mean I will take on such responsibilities as you have mentioned; I advise Miss Forman regarding her duties and her privileges as inheritor of her husband's estate; I look after her interests, financially and socially, for I dare say the poor girl will run a gantlet on board this ship."

"She certainly will, but she has stanch friends in Trent, you and myself. Also, young Nash and Mr. Mallory, and I believe, a few of the women."

"Her list is short, because she has held aloof from the first; I have often heard her stigmatized as snobbish, stuckup and all that. I think it was entirely because she was really in an equivocal position, though no one knew it. And, I think, too, she was afraid of Cox, and dared not mix much, lest he show displeasure."

"Oh, I don't think she was afraid of Cox. I doubt if that girl is afraid of anybody or anything. But she was terribly handicapped by circumstances—and is still. Very well, Mr. Mason, will you express to her your willingness to help her in the matters we've spoken of? Will you tell her that you are doing it at my request, and that you will make it a business deal? For she won't consider your offer otherwise and, too, it is only right that you should expect and receive financial remuneration."

"Yes, that's business, and she has a large fortune," said Mason, without any hint of greed.

So Sherman Mason went at once in search of Maisie, and found her calmly having her tea in her deck chair. Trent sat beside her and Sally Barnes was perched on her footrest.

"Please come with me for a bit of a stroll, Miss Forman," Mason said pleasantly, as he paused in front of her, "I do want a little chat."

Something in his tone was compelling and, too, Trent and Maisie had had a serious talk about Mason, and she deemed it wise to have the proposed chat.

"Glad to," she agreed, cordially and, rising, drew her scarf about her and the two walked off.

"You know," he began, as soon as they were out of the way of the crowd, "I told you you were in deep water."

"Yes, you did," she answered, lightly. "Am I still in it?"

"You are, in deeper than ever. I understand you've made your marriage to Cox public."

Maisie started, but tried to conceal any show of agitation.

"Yes," she replied, "I thought it best."

"It was best. The mistake lay in keeping it secret at all. Why did you do it?"

"Why did I do it?" Her eyes blazed into his. "To get a respite of one more week from that man! To be free for six or seven days, at least. You don't think I loved him, do you?"

As Stone had said, here was no bread-and-butter miss! This girl, this woman, with eyes aglow and cheeks aflame, was a creature of passion and storm.

"He agreed to this?"

"He had to, if I married him at all. Yes, he agreed, and he stuck to his agreement. But he was just waiting to get to Liverpool, and then he proposed to dominate over me for the rest of my life. You knew him, Mr. Mason, you know what a dictatorial, selfish man he was."

"Yes, I know. And you preferred drowning to living with him?"

"I certainly did!"

"Until Prince Charming came along. And then—then, you concluded that Cox's death would serve a better purpose than your own."

Maisie stopped still and faced him. They were virtually alone, no one was within hearing distance.

"Are you implying—"

"Hush. I'm implying nothing. I'm only warning you what is going to happen. What I meant by saying you are in deep water. Can't you see it for yourself? Don't you know that as soon as it becomes known

that you were Cox's wife that you are going to be accused of his death? Don't you know that, in your innermost soul?"

She could only stare at him—frightened, dazed, almost stunned at his calm statements.

"I'm not accusing you, I'm not even asking you if you did or did not kill Cox, I'm only telling you what you're up against. And, I'm asking you to let me help you through with it all."

His voice had dropped to a tender cadence, and she knew, only too well, what that portended.

She knew that the man was in love with her. She had had too many men fall in love on very short acquaintance, not to recognize the symptoms.

There are some types of feminine charm that seem to impel instantaneous surrender from men, and Maisie had long since discovered that her beauty was of that class. At first, it had merely amused her. Then, it had annoyed her. Now that she had found what she knew to be the love of her life, the affection of Max Trent, the avowals of any one else simply disgusted her.

She tried not to show this; indeed, Mason had said nothing of that sort as yet, but she knew intuitively what was coming, and she was on her guard.

Speaking in the coolest tones she could command, she returned, "Thank you Mr. Mason, you are very kind. Please tell me just what you fear for me, and just what you propose to do to assist in averting the danger."

"Very well, I'll put it plainly, then. I fear that you are going to be definitely accused of the death of Oscar Cox, your husband, and what I should do, would be to free you from that accusation or even suspicion."

"You certainly put it plainly. Is it permitted to ask how you would free me?"

"By the simple process of producing the real criminal?"

"You know him, then?"

Mason gave her a long look. In it she easily read direct accusation, coupled with a willingness to turn the tide of suspicion against another.

"Mr. Mason," she cried, "you believe me guilty!"

"I have not said so."

"But you do! I see it in your face. And your plan is to produce another so called suspect, but one whom you know to be innocent—"

"You astound me, child, with your intuition. But that is exactly what I do propose to do. It is all right that I should turn the tide of suspicion away from you, and then if it strikes elsewhere, let the suspect look out for himself. I would do more than that, far more, to save your beautiful neck from the gallows!"

Maisie shuddered.

"Don't be theatrical," she said, with a scornful curve of her lips. "You haven't the slightest bit of evidence against me—"

"Good heavens! I'm not accusing you. I'm telling you that others will. And they won't care for evidence—I mean clews and such things. They'll just take the big facts. You were the unwilling wife of Oscar Cox. You fell madly in love with young Trent. You put Cox out of the way, in order to be free to marry Trent. Now, don't fly into a passion. Look at it calmly. That is what they are going to say, just as surely as that there is a sun shining in that sky! What are you going to do about it?"

Maisie looked at him with the frightened look of a hunted rabbit. He had really terrified her at last, for in her heart she knew his words were true.

But she pulled herself together, and spoke bravely.

"I see the thing as you put it, Mr. Mason. I've no doubt that's the way it seems to you. You're probably right about the way I shall be looked at and talked about. But I didn't kill Oscar Cox—"

"You little idiot! Will you never understand? Whether you did or didn't makes not the slightest difference to public opinion. They will conclude that you did, and they will condemn you in spite of your protestations to the contrary."

"They can't prove I did it, if I didn't."

"In the absence of any other suspect, and with the incentive you had they won't ask for further proof. Listen, do you know

why I'm saying all this to you? - Because Stanhope—he's rather a detective—asked me to."

"Stanhope!" Maisie was thinking. Then Mason didn't know Stanhope was really Fleming Stone. Well, probably that didn't affect matters at all one way or another.

"Mr. Stanhope asked you to?"

"Yes, he seems to take an interest in you, and he told me that now it was known that you are Oscar Cox's widow," Maisie gave an involuntary start at the word, "your financial affairs ought to be attended to by somebody with legal knowledge and experience. So, he asked me to offer my services—for due and proper consideration."

"Oh, yes, your bill will be paid. Just what will you do for me—in business ways, I mean?"

"Oh, see that the will is duly looked after, that the property comes to you, and that you get all your rights in every way. That is all routine work."

"And will you look after it?"

"Yes—for due and proper consideration. But that dueness and propriety is a matter of opinion, you see."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, that in my opinion, the due and proper payment for such services as I can and may render you, would be, not a monetary consideration, but,"—his voice again sank to those soft musical cadences that Maisie dreaded, "but your own dear self."

Mason was a handsome man, and a man of charm. His voice was pleading, his eyes shone with lovelight, and had Maisie been heartfree, she might have been drawn by the fervor of his whole attitude.

But, although she disliked to give unnecessary pain, she knew this thing must be put a stop to, once for all.

"Mr. Mason," she said, gently, "truly I appreciate the honor you do me, but I must ask you to dismiss from your mind the idea that I can ever care for you other than as a friend. I am engaged to Mr. Trent, and some day we shall be married. It may seem strange to become engaged when the man I married has so recently died, but I know you understand."

"I married Oscar Cox under the stern

necessity of saving my father from financial and social ruin. But I left Mr. Cox at the altar steps. I went home with my father and remained there until I boarded this boat. I spoke to Mr. Cox only a few times, and that most casually, during the days he was alive, on board.

"Therefore, I cannot consider myself his wife, save as to the mere legality of the ceremony. And so, I have pledged myself to Max Trent with a clear conscience and a free heart, and I can never listen to words of affection from any other man."

Her quiet, dignified speech was so full of a sense of finality, that Sherman Mason then and there gave up all hope of ever winning the girl for his own.

"Then," he said, coldly, "you may tell Stanhope or any one else you please that my mission has failed, my offer is rejected. For that is the only consideration that would induce me to take up your case in any way. And, Mrs. Cox, I may say, further, that if you are suspected, accused and convicted of murder, remember that I was both able and willing to save you, had you accepted my terms."

He turned on his heel and left her, with a courteous bow, but a sardonic smile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN IN THE LIBRARY.

SLOWLY Maisie went back to her deck chair.

She had made up her mind that whatever she did, she would face the music. She would show no white feather, admit no defeat, but hold up her head and smile, at least, until circumstances should make such an attitude impossible.

She found Sally lying back in her deck chair, and that smiling young person hopped out as she saw Maisie approach.

"Well, my goodness!" she exclaimed as she took on herself the task of arranging pillows and adjusting rugs, "so you're Mrs. Oscar Cox! My goodness!"

Maisie marveled at the rapidity with which the news had got about, not knowing that sharp ears had overheard enough of her talk with Mason to get a start and

imagination and scandal-mongering had done the rest.

Controlling her surprise, Maisie said, simply, "Yes, dear. Who told you?"

"Oh, it's all over the boat. And, say, Maisie, they're all saying that you killed him! Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?"

"I certainly never did! You can deny it, if you hear it again."

"That, of course. But you must know who did kill him, don't you, Maisie? I've been asking Mr. Trent, and he doesn't seem to know anything! Not a blessed thing! Oh, I say, I've just thought of something! You know, Mr. Cox told us that before we reached Liverpool—no, when we reached there, he'd tell us something that would give us the surprise of our lives! I'll bet it was this news, don't you?"

"Very likely," Maisie returned. "We expected to tell it when we landed. We had our own reasons for keeping it secret during the voyage."

"Yes, of course," and Sally nodded her bobbed head sagaciously. She was enjoying the excitement, and she cared little for the facts or the truth, if she could get what she called "thrills" out of it.

"And so all that jewelry was really yours!" she exclaimed. "Well, can you tie that! Isn't it wonderful to have such exciting things happen to you?"

"Very wonderful," said Maisie, dryly.

"And you've got a new stewardess, haven't you? She's the same one we have and she tells us all about you. She says you cried all night last night."

"Why, I didn't do any such thing!" said Maisie, indignantly. Then she laughed, and turning to Trent said, "About as much privacy as Irvin Cobb's gold fish! Well, it doesn't matter. But Sally, dear, don't believe everything that's told you, especially by servants."

"Oh, they're not as bad as ladies and gentlemen! You ought to hear the Campers hold forth! When Lady Amy first heard that you were Mrs. Cox, she took in enough air to float her! But it wasn't half a jiff before she was running round in circles, telling other people, and her yarns grew bigger every song hit she made!"

"Here she comes now," said Trent, aside. "Can you stand her, dear?"

"Yes, if you'll help," Maisie smiled bravely at him.

"Oh, here you are, Mrs. Cox," said Amy Camper, as with a malicious smile, she paused at Maisie's chair.

"Yes, here I am, Mrs. Camper. How are you to-day?"

"Fine. I was so surprised to hear the news about you. You don't incline to wearing mourning, I see."

"Oh, no one does, nowadays, Mrs. Camper," Trent broke in, with an air of tolerance of her ignorance. "I suppose they still do, where you come from, but the cities gave it up years ago."

It was not like Trent to stoop to caustic rudeness, but he felt it was a crisis and unless he snubbed this woman good and hard, she would make trouble for Maisie.

"I supposed anybody of fine feelings would want to show a little respect for a dead husband," she snapped out.

"Then allow me to correct your ideas. One might feel respect, but the showing of it, as you express it, is old fashioned and—er—is not done by the better informed classes. Any other little points on which you are at sea? Don't hesitate to ask me, I'm always glad to be of service."

Trent's air was so bland, and his expression one of such kindly condescension, that Sally burst into peals of merriment, and rushed away to tell her crowd about it.

Her purpose was so evident, that Amy Camper flushed deeply with annoyance.

Yet she dared not give back an impertinent answer, lest she be again over-matched by the quick wit of her tormentor.

Maisie was shaking with silent laughter, as Amy abruptly departed.

"I didn't think you could do it, Max. I didn't know you had it in you."

"I don't often," he said, with a contrite air, "but she had it coming to her."

"She certainly did! And I'm glad you gave it to her. Now, I suppose she'll be more viperous than ever."

"No, I think she's scared off, a little."

"I hope so. Oh, dear, shall we ever get to Liverpool? I'm not sure I can stand much more?"

"Cheer up, dear, the worst is yet to come!"

"I believe you!" and Maisie's smile was a sad one.

"That is," Max went on, "unless we can get at the murderer. Do you know, I believe Fleming Stone is on his track. He went by a few moments ago, and he seemed elated, if I could judge by his expression. Have we told him everything we know, Maisie?"

"Yes—I think so. Except, there's one thing, that I just now thought of myself. You know, Max, 'Muff' is dad's nickname for me. It grew out of M. F. As a child, I used to sign myself M. F. and call it Muff. And the name stuck."

"Why, that's what they thought was a code word in Mason's wireless."

"Mason's? I thought it was in Mr. Cox's note he put in the ship's mailbox."

"It was in both. I say, dear, we must tell Stone that. He ought to have every possible point that can help him."

"Of course; let's go and tell him, and then we must dress for dinner. I mean to look my prettiest to-night, and dance and everything."

"Plucky girl! I'm so proud of you, Maisie, the way you carry on!"

"Only because I have you back of me. That and my offended pride. I could do 'most anything rather than let Amy Camper see me wilt."

"She won't. Dear, I think, too, I'll show Stone the gloves that Sally found. They seem to me to mean nothing, but they may carry a message to him."

"Well, get them. I'll wait here."

In a moment Trent returned with the gloves from his stateroom, and they went in search of Stone.

They found him alone, in a deserted corner of the deck.

First, Trent gave him the gloves and told the story of their finding.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Stone, "why weren't these forthcoming sooner? Why so chary of them?"

"Didn't think the matter of any account," Max replied, flushing a little, for he could see the detective was deeply interested in them.

"Gloves are always interesting," Stone said, dropping his eager air, but stuffing the gloves in his pocket. "Anything else?" for he could see Maisie had something to tell.

"Yes, Mr. Stone," she spoke low. "I want to tell you about the word Muff. It is a name for me, though I don't know whether it carries that meaning in the letters and messages you have found."

"Of course, it does." Stone stared at her. "Did Mason ask you to let him look after your law business?"

She gave him a brief but complete account of the proposition Mason had made to her, and the consideration he had stipulated.

"I rather looked for that," and Stone nodded. "Well, Miss Forman, can't you see, that he hoped for better luck in his wooing? He sent a wireless to Frey, you know, that, as we read it, meant Cox was dead and he would take Muff with him to Italy."

"Meaning me!" exclaimed Maisie, while Trent suppressed the ejaculation that rose to his lips.

"Yes. And furthermore, I'm inclined to think that the letter enclosed in another letter, which we found Mr. Cox had put in the ship's mailbox, marked J. F. had an ultimate destination at your father's house. And that 'Muff all right,' was an assurance of your own well being."

"It must be as you say," said Maisie, musingly. "Oh, Mr. Stone, you can do so much can't you do more? Can't you find out who killed Oscar Cox? Unless you do, it looks pretty black for—"

"Tut, tut! You're not going to despair, I hope. Give me a little more time. Are you subjected to much unpleasantness, Miss Forman?"

"Yes, she is," Trent asserted. "But she's as brave as they come, and if you can bring it off, and succeed in your quest, we'll try to forget the slings and arrows that are being hurled at us. Of course, it hits Miss Forman the hardest, but I want to back her up, and buck her up all I can."

"You do, Max," the girl said, "if it were not for you, I'd just lay me doon and dee!"

"Run along, children," Stone said, in a

kindly way, "keep up your courage, and, for Heaven's sake if you have any more gloves or information or anything so much as a pin's worth, do bring it to me."

Maisie had a difficult evening. She donned one of her smartest and most becoming dance frocks, she assumed a manner of lightness and gayety, and to look at her, one would think she had not a care in the world.

The news had swept the ship like wild-fire. Everybody, almost, who spoke to her, called her Mrs. Cox and, though it made her wince, she realized it was their right to do so.

Polly Nash and Hal Mallory were delightfully sympathetic, and showed it by avoiding the subject uppermost in every one's mind, and talking gay nonsense that helped to put Maisie more at her ease.

She was besieged by partners begging for dances, and at last went to her room, Thoroughly tired out.

Trent took her for a brief good night tryst on the upper deck, but she dared not say much for she felt there were spies everywhere.

"If I knew what to fear, it would be easier," she said, with a pathetic little sigh. "But this vague fear of something or somebody unknown is wearing me out."

"My blessed darling," Trent whispered, "brave it out a little longer. We'll land Sunday morning, and then, whatever happens, we'll meet it together."

They said good night, and Maisie went to her room. She felt more depressed than ever before. She began to despair of Stone's success, and the way Mason had talked and the way he felt about her refusal to accept his terms, seemed to her to portend dire and immediate disaster.

But next morning she felt better and more able to cope with her difficulties. She was dressing, after her morning coffee, when a note was brought her summoning her to the captain's room at once.

Hastily finishing her toilette, she ran off and was not surprised to find Fleming Stone and Max Trent both there.

There was no one else present, but there was a feeling of suppressed excitement discernible, and she felt almost certain that

she was about to hear something encouraging.

"I believe," Fleming Stone said, with a quiet smile, "that it is considered claptrap when a detective reads from some inconsequential clew the complete description of the criminal."

"That's what I build my stories on," Trent declared, smiling in return. "If I didn't do that, I'd make no hit at all."

"It's what I propose to do now," said Stone, speaking more gravely, this time. "You see these gloves."

He held up to view the gloves that Sally had retrieved from the women in the lower cabin.

"These," he went on, "tell me the whole story. That is, using them in addition to the facts I had already learned. As you see, they are new gloves, apparently never worn, save on the tragic occasion of Mr. Cox's death. I speak thus definitely, for I am sure of my deductions. They are of fine quality, tan kid, and made by one of New York's best haberdashers. They are large size, I mean larger than the average man's hand."

"Yes, they're larger than I wear," said the captain, showing marked interest, "and I have a large hand."

"These are the gloves worn by the man in the library—the man who killed Oscar Cox by leaning out of the library window, and striking him twice—two fearful blows—with that heavy and deadly weapon, the bronze hand. He wore the gloves, of course, in order that he should leave no telltale fingerprints on the bronze, which he threw from him as soon as it had served his purpose.

"Now, the murderer, as we agreed long ago, is of a most clever and acute intelligence. He was even smart enough to buy new gloves for this deed, and to buy them too large for himself, which was a fine bit of precaution.

"This is not surmise only, for you can see if you carefully note these blood stains on this glove that the way the kid folds over, and the stains show on the folds, proves that the glove was on the hand of a man who would naturally take a smaller size."

Maisie was content to take Stone's word for this, but the two men looked at the glove intently, and saw it was as the detective said.

"Of course, he wore only one glove, the right one. The other is stained where they were rolled together. The murderer's mistake lay in his throwing the gloves overboard to windward, which he must have done, since they blew in below deck and fell at the feet of the women in the lower cabin.

"Now, from these gloves, and from other information I have picked up, I deduce the murderer of Oscar Cox to be a large, rather stout man of medium height and with hands rather small in proportion to his muscular strength. He has hair that is slightly gray, is beginning to show a hint of baldness, wears a short close-cropped mustache, has a group of small wrinkles at the outer corner of each eye, is an up-to-date and immaculate dresser, wears a seal ring, with his family crest on it and is addicted to light blue neckties."

As he proceeded Stone smiled a little, and as his hearers grew more and more astounded, he allowed himself a slight chuckle of amusement.

But Maisie Forman did not smile.

"If that is your man in the library, Mr. Stone," she said, slowly, "then the murderer—for you have described him perfectly—is Sherman Mason."

Stone bowed in acquiescence, and the captain struck the table sharply with his fist.

"Do you mean that?" he cried. "Do you mean that Mr. Mason killed Oscar Cox?"

"I do," Stone said, "and I recommend that you take what action you think best, but do it promptly. He is a slippery customer, and quite capable of eluding you at Liverpool, unless carefully guarded."

"Well, well," and Captain Van Winkle pondered. "Sherman Mason! And the motive, Mr. Stone?"

"That I cannot state positively, but it was some matter connected with the group of swindlers—or at least crooked promoters of which Miss Forman told us. All such matters can be cleared up later. I fancy, captain, that if you get the man in here

and put him through a course of sprouts, he may be induced to confess."

Calling a messenger the captain sent for Mason at once.

"You didn't really get all that from the gloves?" he said to Stone.

"Oh, no, I was just stringing you. I had made up my mind Mason was our man, one day in the smoking room, when I noticed his acute attention to the opinions of others about the Cox case, while never voicing his own thoughts. Then when I saw the gloves, I remembered how eagerly Mason had listened when they were discussed that day and, too, I realized how clever Mason was and how like him it would be to buy those new and large gloves as a precaution against possible discovery."

There was a tap at the door and, instead of Mason, the man Hudder presented himself.

"Captain, sir," he said awkwardly, "I have to tell you that Mr. Mason, is—gone."

"Gone! What do you mean?"

"He is gone—drowned—overboard from the ship. Here, sir."

Hudder handed out a folded note, which the captain quickly read and then passed it to Stone, who read it aloud.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

"I am tired of life, and since my love for a certain woman is unrequited, I have nothing left to live for. Therefore, I am about to commit suicide by drowning. It is now 3 A.M. and no one will be about on deck. I shall throw myself overboard. I make no confession or admission of any wrongdoing, and I request that my effects be sent to my home in accordance with the labels I have affixed.

"SHERMAN MASON."

"Well, to my mind that's tantamount to a confession," said Trent. "The man knew he was in for it, and he preferred death by drowning to the electric chair."

But to his surprise he heard a throaty gurgle behind him, and turned to see Fleming Stone holding Hudder down by the throat and speaking in a menacing voice.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me at once, and truly where Mr. Mason is, or you will be arrested for the murder of your master, Mr. Cox."

For a short time, Hudder remained silent, and then at a slight manifestation of jujutsu from Stone he gave a cry of pain, and gasped; "I tell! I tell! Let me up!"

Stone let him up and, still holding him by the collar, said sternly, "Tell, then!"

"I can't tell—but I show."

"Very well. Captain, this note is a fake. Mason is not overboard at all. This man knows where he is. Pardon me for taking matters so much into my own hands, but I felt sure that to strike at once was the way to manage this thing. Will you send two husky men with Hudder to bring Mason here?"

Quickly comprehending, the captain did so, and after a time, the men returned bringing between them a very angry and red-faced, but quiet-mannered, Mason.

"Well, the jig is up!" he said, as he slumped into a chair and looked about at the faces of those confronting him. "Sorry, I didn't pull it off better. Who are you, Stanhope, anyway? You've got my goat!"

"He's Fleming Stone!" exclaimed Trent, unable to resist this opportunity to startle Mason.

"Oh, Lord, is that so! Well, no wonder I couldn't get away with it. And may I ask, Mr. Stone, why you didn't believe in my little note?"

"Only because it didn't sound genuine," Stone returned, carelessly. "A man about to kill himself doesn't write so collectedly and casually. Anyway that's how it struck me. Now, Mr. Mason, do you want to make a confession as to the killing of Oscar Cox?"

"An explanation, rather than a confession," said the man, who was breathing heavily now, and seemed on the verge of collapse.

But he pulled himself together, and after a secretary had been called in, he told his story.

"We were four of us, Frey, Forman, Cox and myself." We did do some crooked work, and Forman, Miss Maisie's father, though he did nothing wrong, was made the catspaw. He was our tool, and he was so innocent, that we used him unscrupulously.

ly until the very end. Then, as he was in bad, and about to go under, Cox, who was the Judas Iscariot and carried the bag, turned traitor, and told Forman if he would give him his daughter, he, Cox would save Forman from all disgrace and trouble.

"The temptation was strong, and when Miss Forman learned of it, she insisted on accepting the chance to save her father. She made her stipulation for a week's freedom on board the boat, and I dare say she did mean to kill herself rather than land at Liverpool in Oscar Cox's care. Well, when Frey, who is the arch fiend behind the whole thing, learned of Cox's perfidy—you see Cox had really decamped with all the funds, except what he paid Forman—he, Frey, offered me an enormous sum of money to follow Cox and kill him.

"So, as you see, I'm merely Frey's tool, too—merely a gunman. Yes, I killed Cox and I'm glad I did. He was all kinds of a bad man, and I'd gladly killed him if only to rescue Miss Forman from his clutches. Anyway, there's all there is of it."

"Now I've turned State's evidence, you want to get hold of Frey—he's the real villain of the piece. Better send a quick message, captain, and arrest him right off. You see, I thought after Cox was out of it, I could get Miss Maisie for myself—but I didn't."

Mason was a pitiable object. His gentlemanly aspect which he had worn as a gar-

ment, slipped away, and he was his true self, a common, wicked criminal.

He began to talk wildly, he used bad language, and as he blurted out a terrible oath Trent rose and drew Maisie to him, and quickly led her from the room.

"They don't need us, dear," he said, gently, as they went out to their deck chairs. "The captain will put that terrible man where he belongs, and Stone and the captain together will take care of the rest. Try to forget it all, for the moment, anyway, and just realize that it's all over so far as you are concerned."

And so it was. Mason was kept prisoner until he was turned over to the authorities at Liverpool. Frey was apprehended and both he and Mason later paid the extreme penalty.

But thanks to youth and buoyancy, thanks to love and happiness, Trent and his Maisie were able to throw off the remembrance of the voyage, and Lily Gibbs proved an efficient and satisfactory chaperon until circumstances made it convenient for the wedding to take place.

This occurred in London, and Sally Barnes insisted on being bridesmaid. After the ceremony she greeted the bride with her usual breezy air, saying:

"Now, Mrs. Trent, you can be as up-stage as you like—you can't scare me. I knew you when you didn't know whether to sink or swim!"

THE END



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Without Fear or Favor

By **DON WATERS**

OLD Clancey McNamara, section foreman, slit the yellow envelope with his finger and unfolded a bulletin that had just been flung off number eighty-seven. Painfully, he read, spelling out each typewritten word on the sheet while his gang, resting on their tamping bars and shovels, stood around curiously in a half circle.

Then with a yell, he shouted: "Would ye listen to this, byes? Hurrah! 'Tis down in black and white. 'Tis me own son." Excitedly waving his hat in the air, old Clancey shouted: "Hurrah!"

"What is it, cap'n?" one of the astonished gang of workmen inquired at this outburst.

"What is it, is it, ye ask? 'Tis me own son and no other. He has done it, byes. Ye can't keep a good man down. Hurray fer ye, Michael Emmet! Read fer yerselves if ye want to know."

He handed the bulletin to one of his men, who read:

Attention of Mr. Clancey McNamara, foreman of section forty-one. Mr. M. E. McNamara has been appointed superintendent, superseding Mr. C. L. Clarke, transferred to the Branchville division, to take effect this date.

W. W. JAMES,
Chief Clerk.

The letter was handed back to the old man with the words: "Cap'n, your son sure has gone up fast. It wasn't over six years since he left here. He wasn't nothing but an operator then and now he's superintendent. Some are lucky and some ain't," the section hand concluded.

"Lucky!" the old man roared. "Lucky, ye spalpeen! Me son's just getting his dues. It's no more than what he should have. 'Highball,' they calls him, and 'Highball' he is. Ye watch things move now. Ye'll see how to railroad. No more

of yer squandering and sojering. No more of yer loafering." Then suddenly as he noticed his gang resting easily on their bars and shovels, he shouted: "To work wi' ye! What do ye mean a restin' around and me own son a lookin' at me to have this the foinest kept section in the entoire road. To work wi' ye!"

The gang started with feverish activity to reline a section of warped track, and for the rest of the day they worked at a rapid pace driven on by the sharp tongue of old Clancey.

But the deliberate habits they had been accustomed to soon reasserted themselves. Next morning they were a half hour late in assembling at the section shanty and before the hand car had been loaded and pumped a mile up the track, the sun was riding well up over the tops of the hills in the east. Before noon they were back in their slow and easy pace and tamped ties to the tune of, "By—the day—by—the—day," stopping occasionally to catch their breath and listen to the foreman's tales of how his boy had climbed up the ladder that leads to success in the railroad world.

As the section gang reacted to the news, so did the entire division. For a few days things went on at a jump, for there was a flurried uncertainty as to how the new superintendent would act. Tales of "High-ball" Mac, who as trainmaster of the Terminal division, had been a "hard hitter," showing neither fear nor favoritism, were passed around the switchmen's shanties and were elaborated by groups loafing about the roundhouse.

A "hard hitter" was surely needed on the mountain division, for it was in bad shape. The track was ill kept; low joints, rotten ties and weaving, shaky trestles marked the hundred and fifty miles of its course up and down the mountains to the rolling country that led to the Seaboard and the Tidewater divisions. The engines were but hastily repaired at the shops and often one went on the drop pit for a "class five," as a complete overhauling was called, and came off in worse shape than before. The joke of the division was "a new coat of paint on an engine, and they stick a hundred ton more load on her train."

Old Colonel Clarke had been superintendent for twenty years, an easy going, friendly overseer. He had come on the division when a half dozen flaring stack, wood-burning engines were the motive power and, slow and conservative, he had been unable to adapt himself to changing conditions.

Since the Civil War the Cotton States had been the one railroad that served a ten thousand square miles of the sparsely settled Blue Ridge Mountains. Then the coal fields of West Virginia and Tennessee were opened. Competition had begun: a new route traced its way along the river courses and through the gaps, a road laid out scientifically, a one per cent grade, a short cut from the mountains to tidewater.

Rumors of the "one per cent" were rife for several years. Then came the word—it was opened. The long strings of coal on the mountain division came through less frequently. Business became duller and duller and in six months but few cars of coal fell to the Cotton States.

The old hit and miss system that had prevailed for generations, went down in defeat before newer methods. Up in the general office one day, a group of men sat around a table comparing figures. There was talk of "pounds coal per ton mile," "terminal overtime," and "road engine failures." Of all the divisions on the Cotton States, the mountain division led the rest in cost of operation.

"Great balls of fire!" the superintendent of motive power shouted as he shook a type-written file above his head. "Listen, the mountain division last month averaged three hundred ton of coal per day. It took ten pounds of coal to move a ton of freight a mile, over twice as much as any other division."

Across the table, the general manager said in his quiet, even voice that was more striking than the other's shout: "Out of six hundred passenger trains on the mountain division run during the preceding thirty days, less than one hundred were on time. The average delay was over eighteen minutes per train, a total delay of almost eight whole days. Gentlemen, I suggest we put a new man in charge and," pausing, "Mc-

Namara, trainmaster at present on this division has a record for putting things across."

A buzz of conversation followed, and ten minutes later the order was burning its way across the wires. Old Colonel Clarke was deposed. Highball McNamara was promoted to superintendent of the slack, mismanaged mountain link of the railroad.

He found on first acquaintance a condition of affairs that to him was unthinkable, and the days that passed, each brought new evidence of intolerable slackness.

As he stood in front of the station one morning, a yard engine hauled up with a string of coaches and stopped before him. The pop opened. There was a rush and a roar and for five minutes the plume of steam from her safety valve shot up into the air.

Finally, as it showed no signs of slackening, he rapidly crossed the track and climbed up into the cab. The switch engineer sat, feet propped against the boiler head, reading the morning paper aloud to the fireman.

As young McNamara stepped onto the steel apron of the tender, the clang of his heel sounded above the noise of escaping steam. He glanced at the water glass. The boiler level of the water was not up to the halfway mark. He jerked open the injector on the fireman's side and the rush of cold water soon lowered the boiler pressure. The steam quit blowing off. Instead of a timorous pair whom he expected to greet with a warning, the two in the cab glared at him belligerently.

"Don't you fellows know you might as well be throwing coal out the gangway as wasting it through the pops. Every minute an engine blows off it means a shovelful of coal has been wasted."

The engineer answered: "Yeah. We've heard all that stuff before. I've been running an engine for twenty years now, and no one can tell me anything about it. You keep your hands off of my injectors. I'll tend to them."

Highball McNamara had seen slackness galore on the division, but this was the first time he had met with open insubordination. He gave one glance at the two engineers. It was a showdown. His jaw set.

"You fellows are relieved," was his answer. Then, going to the call office, he ordered another crew for the switch engine.

Trouble started. Hardly had he got back to his office when a delegation was ushered in. The Brotherhood was up in arms.

"Unthinkable" was the word the committee used. "Outside your jurisdiction. Engineer responsible for his management of the motive power. Master mechanic must handle the matter."

To all of which Highball listened calmly. When the clatter had stopped he replied: "I want you and every one else on this whole division to know I'm superintendent here. Any man who don't hit the ball and work for the good of the road, I don't give a damn who he is, is going to get a nice long rest. There is no mechanical department nor roadway department nor transportation department. There's just me. I might not last long, but, by Heaven, as long as I last, I'm the big boss, and before I leave, you fellows are going to know the book of rules better than you do your contract. Good morning. I've work to do and can't waste any more time."

As the sullen, angry committee filed out Highball Mac began to realize the proposition he was up against. He tried in vain to evolve some solution, some manner in which he could bring the division together. They lacked coördination and the *esprit de corps* was sadly missing.

During the next week a dozen men were up on the carpet, disciplined for serious breaches of the rules and laid off without any apparent results, except that from an easy-going, slipshod division the mountain branch became disorganized and jumpy. A spirit of sullen nervousness pervaded the entire corps of employees.

Highball McNamara had got word that a joint meeting was to be held. Engineers, conductors, firemen, brakemen, shop crafts and the roadway forces all had joined issues, and on the coming Sunday were to hold a meeting. This was the best news he had heard since he had taken the job. For he had at least given the men a common grievance, and it was but a step to join them into a compact body, working together for the good of the service.

On the Saturday morning of the day before the meeting was to take place he went into the dispatcher's office. The trainmaster, Brown, was sitting on the instrument table telling a funny story at which the four operators laughed uproariously. Unseen by the men, McNamara stood listening while the instruments called "A. J.; A. J.; A. J.—the terminal call, dot-dash, space, dot-dot-dash, space-dot—rattled monotonously insistent from three or four sounders and was disregarded.

Highball stepped over to the table, opened a switch, and with practiced hand rattled the key. To the confused group in the dispatcher's room there came the dots and dashes of Morse, "B. J.; B. J.; B.J." He was calling the Branchville operator at Lakeland.

The answer came; then to their astonished ears McNamara sent the message in reply: "Operator Lewis report to me at once. Appoint you trainmaster. Am sending relief. McNamara."

Highball Mac closed the key. Turning to the trainmaster, he said tersely: "You're through. Do you want to resign or would you rather be fired for neglect of duty and incompetency? You have till Lewis reports to make up your mind."

He stalked out of the room, leaving an astounded group of key pounders to stare wide-eyed at his back as he strode down the hallway toward his office.

Now, there are no secrets over a railroad telegraph line. Yard office, call shanty and a dozen stations heard the call and the message. Lewis of the Branchville was trainmaster. Brown, whom the whole division detested—a crabbed dyspeptic, who only held his job by virtue of being a relative of the general manager—was fired.

Highball Mac had shown nerve to "tie the can to the G. M.'s pet." He was no "wishy-washy," and if there is one thing at a premium on a railroad, it is nerve. He was offering Lewis a big advance, both in authority and salary, from operator on the Branchville to trainmaster on the Mountain division.

Lakeland lay out at the far end of a tri-weekly. That is, there were but three trains a week over it, and an accommodation

freight which carried a couple of passenger coaches. The few traveling salesmen who used the Branchville line had a standing joke about the tri-weekly trains: "Try to get back the same week."

It was just a little old decrepit branch that used the cast-off cars and the worn-out engines from the main line, but little different from a hundred other branch lines that serve the backwoods and thinly settled sections of this country.

But in one way it differed: one man alone made the Branchville stand out, one deed lived and had become a saga. It was ten years since Lewis had put the Branchville line on the front page of the newspapers, had done a deed that caused the entire State to swell with pride in the reading. It was following the dry summer when rain had not fallen for three months. Fall came, the woods that lined the right of way were dun-colored, the twigs underfoot snapped brittle, the stand of spruces and hemlock lost their dark healthy color, turned a sickly, poisonous yellow-green, and the underbrush in the still air, close-packed, parched, was arrayed, awaiting the inevitable.

One night, when the air hung stifling and dead, when the miasma from the little lake from which Lakeland got its name rose thick and gasping, stronger than the heavy odor of pine resin, the red demon burst out. In a dozen places, as though by magic, fire appeared.

In two hours a roaring wall of flame growled and popped, punctuated by dull thuds as tree after tree crashed down, a blazing torch that carried the flames farther into the timber.

Then the wind arose and a galloping phalanx, hot from hell, a wall of living flame, swept toward Lakeland. The train crew had gone in that afternoon. The coaches and engine were at the other end of the division. The extra engine, decrepit, rattly and rusted, stood under the rough board shed, and a string of box cars, empties, on the siding, awaiting their load of tan bark.

At the first whiff of smoke Lewis had left his shanty. He fired the engine, ran it out and waited for what he felt sure was coming.

The wind became stronger, and Lakeland was doomed. In an hour, to the aid of fire, a gale had sprung up. Lewis coupled the cars together, and the half thousand men and women who comprised the population of Lakeland hurried panic-stricken down to the tracks, their one chance of escape.

Lewis never told the tale of that wild ride. He spent six weeks in the hospital, burned frightfully. But the tales his passengers told were almost beyond believing, of a man alone in the cab who fired and drove the engine through walls of blistering flame, who stopped a half dozen times to jerk and twist with almost superhuman strength at the burning trees that blocked the track.

The scorched and blistered engine, the box cars ablaze in a dozen places, after he had crossed Bear Wallow River on the burning bridge, and carried the train to safety, told their own tale, if other witnesses were struck dumb by their nearness to a death that men dread above all others.

Lewis started from Lakeland that night, a young man, straight and supple and a little more than ordinarily handsome. When he came out of the hospital he carried the livid scar of deep-burned flesh across his face. His left arm hung limp and useless at his side. He walked with a twist and a limp.

The company did not let such services go unrewarded. He got a nice typewritten letter informing him that his hospital bill was paid. He could report for duty at his old job as soon as consistent, and his salary had been raised—five dollars a month.

There was whispered talk that Lewis had rattled the key furiously for a couple of hours before the wild ride, first imploring, then demanding a train be sent. Brown, the trainmaster, must have been in a particularly nasty mood that day, for he had refused. Lewis had "gone over his head" and wired the colonel, who in turn referred the message back to the trainmaster.

It is a serious breach of railroad etiquette to "go over" one's superior officer, and the deed rankled with Brown. Consequently only the letter and meager raise followed; for Brown had influence with the powers who rule.

But if the company was niggardly, the men who did the work of the road appreciated Lewis. His scars became a badge of courage, his limp a patent of nobility. Woe betide the new man on the road whose face twisted but the slightest at the sight of the crippled and almost grotesque operator at the fire-scarred terminal of Lakeland.

When Highball Mac sent his message, inside of an hour, many a hard-faced engine-man with the love of battle written big all over him unclenched his fists, and a far-away look came into his eyes. The angry groups that hung on the edge of mutiny dispersed. For who could hold a grudge against a man who would fire a hated official like the trainmaster and give the job to a popular favorite like Lewis?

Highball Mac had knocked their props from under them. The much-talked-of Sunday meeting fell flat. Not over a dozen men attended out of the thousand who had promised to be there. The first move had been Mac's. The division waited for the second, that was not long in coming.

Monday morning arrived. The Perishable Special loaded with peaches from the groves of Georgia stood on the track waiting for the conductor to check the waybills. He hurried out of the yard office, waved the manifests in the air. The big locomotive gave a couple of tentative puffs; then just before it settled down to its steady roar that would carry the train fast over the division Highball Mac swung aboard.

Without a word he seated himself on the front edge of the fireman's seat box as the train pulled out. On a schedule faster than a passenger train the Peach Growers' Special swept around the curves, barked up the grades, and thundered across the trestles, hurrying its cargo to the big cities in the North.

It passed through a dozen little towns without slackening pace, on time to the minute, and covered half the division without a slow-down. There is an unwritten rule on the railroad that the Peach Special has the right of way, and the man who holds her up gives serious offense. But on the mountain division even this rule was lightly observed.

As the train hurried through a cut, the roar died down. There was a *toot-toot* from the whistle, and Highball Mac looked out to see a section man with a red flag in his hand waving her down. The engine pulled slowly up to him. He climbed aboard.

"What's the trouble?" was the superintendent's query.

"Oh, nothing. We're just raising a low joint, and have a couple of jacks under the rail."

"Didn't you fellows know the Peach Special was due?"

"Oh, sure," was the offhand answer.

"Oh, sure, is it?" repeated Mac, looking ahead to where a group of section men languidly worked the jackhandles. The engineer brought the train to a halt, got off, and walked ahead, followed by Mac.

As the superintendent approached he stopped, one foot in the air like a pointer dog before a covey of birds. Then the astonishment on his face gave way to another look that boded no good to the section foreman.

Going up to him, he said:

"You got my bulletin about a clear rail for the Peach Express, didn't you?"

Turning around, the foreman started to speak. His jaw dropped down. Amazed, he stared. Words failed him. McNamara, the father, faced McNamara, the son. Without answering, the old man stood dumfounded. A strained minute passed.

Highball Mac spoke: "Get your tools up and back to the section shanty. You and your whole gang are fired."

For five minutes the train waited, while the crew slowly cleared the track. Then the engineer blew a series of long drawn out whistle blows, calling in the flagman, a highball from the caboose, and the train moved past an astonished section crew.

Before night the division knew that Highball had fired his own father. For the first time in years, Eighty-six, the passenger train from the East, came in on time, and all next day there were but three delays. The sleepy Mountain division had awakened. Well each man realized that the new superintendent was going to run it without fear or favor. A man who would fire his own father would not hesitate to fire them.

A new order of things rapidly came into being. The old slovenly methods were forgotten, and the Mountain division in the next six months took on an air of smartness it had not known before. Hundreds of men who never had put in a full day's work "hit the ball" and accomplished their honest day's labor. Men talked less of their rights, and gradually a spirit of pride in the performance of the division began to manifest itself.

The delays were infrequent and generally unavoidable. Scarce once a month did the wrecking crew go out. The coal consumption was cut in half and, wonder of wonders, the running schedule for trains on the Branchville was raised from fifteen to twenty miles an hour.

Then came the big day when the news passed around that the circus was coming. For ten years the company had refused to haul a circus train over the Mountain division. A disastrous wreck, a suit for damages to costly equipment and expensive live stock, doubly expensive since they had been killed in a wreck, had been the aftermath of the last circus train the Mountain division handled. As a criterion of how much the division had improved under the new management, the powers that be signed a contract to carry the "Greatest Show on Earth" clear across the entire system, Mountain division included.

The circus showed up early one morning, three long sections, each one a heavy drag, a train in itself that would need a helper to push it over the worst grades. The sun shone brightly on circus day. An enormous crowd gathered from miles around and each train into the terminal carried an extra coach or two loaded to capacity with passengers for the show.

McNamara, with his usual foresight, put on a couple of half-fare excursion trains, and these came steaming in crowded with men and women and with many a bright-eyed child who was to see the circus for the first time. Extra trains on the Mountain division—the very thought was thrilling to many an old-timer.

Old Clancey McNamara sat before his little house beside the railroad above the lower of the two bridges that spanned the

Red Deer River, and watched them rattle by. Each engineer passing saluted the old man with a greeting from the whistle and a wave of a gloved hand.

Clancey, in return, waved back and smiled with pleasure at the thought that the "byes who druv the trains" still remembered him even if his own son had forgotten. With mixed emotions, he had seen the traffic increase on the road. There was a certain pride that the "one per cent" couldn't keep the business, a little pleasure that his son was doing so fine, and a lot of regret that he himself was not doing his part in the work of the road.

Many the night he walked the track with his lantern examining the work the new section gang was doing. With muttered criticisms of the new methods, but with an approval of the results, the old man kept in touch with his section.

For it never really entered his mind that he was fired for good. Just a week or two and that "new-fangled spalpeen will get sick of the job. It takes men of experience and of judgment to be a good section foreman. Just ye wait till the rains come," were his comments to the old section crew.

"Wait till the rains come" was his slogan, and even to-day, glancing up at the sun, hanging a sulphur yellow mass in an ashy sky, old Clancey shook his head.

"Reminds me of the times before the big fire out on the Lakeland branch. 'Twas the same way. Fer two months we didn't have a drop of rain. Thin the sun came out that day, a sickly yellow like the cinter of a rotten egg, and that afternoon we had a little sprinkle and that evening—'twas just at dusk—I says to the byes: 'Be getting up yer tools, the now, and let's get back, for mark me words, 'tis not much sleep the night ye'll be getting.' And faith, I was right.

"Hardly had it got dark when, whosh down came the water that had been banking up for two months. Whosh and a roar! Cricks that ye could almost stop by drinking came rooshing torrents that would sweep ye off yer feet. And the section was terrible. A couple of hours, every fill for twenty miles had slid out, and every cut had slid in.

"Meself, I worked for three weeks with-

out taking off me clothes to sleep or changing me socks till I wore the feet clear out of them. There wasn't a tristle standin' from Weaver's Valley clear to the two bridges here, and they trimblin' like leaves as the river ran over the ties. 'Twas jest sich a day and 'twas a terrible night. Ye mark me words, we're in fer another like it."

Old Clancey McNamara's prophecies proved all too true. That afternoon as the circus was showing, a light patter of rain fell, increased in intensity and volume, and inside an hour a regular "gully washer" was pouring down.

There was a sigh of relief from a thousand persons. Rain was badly needed. Murmurs of satisfaction, however, soon changed into expressions of concern as the swishing gusts of the downpour continued, abrupt, jagged bursts of lightning and crashing, rolling salvos of thunder reverberated, magnified a hundred times through the big tent.

The wind caught under the flapping canvas; overburdened and heavy with water, it swayed and careened. There was a splintering sound as the center poles gave way, and like a cloud the big top lifted up and sailed off.

A frenzied volume of shrieks followed. Then came a stampede for shelter. The nearest cover was the trains they had come in on, and inside five minutes the coaches were crammed to twice their normal capacity by a tightly wedged mass of rain-soaked people.

A hurried consultation in the dispatcher's office, and Lewis checked the incoming trains, then gave the word: "Run the four excursions back as one train. Let No. 86 take the siding between No. 1 and 2 bridges till the excursions go by. We must get those passengers home before the track becomes impassable. It's going to be hell to-night if this rain keeps up."

He stopped and listened intently. A telegraph instrument on the table clicked out a warning, sharp and insistent above the dozen other sounders.

The intermittent metallic dots and dashes gave the backing to the trainmaster's words, for they rattled a brief sentence that could not go unheeded: "Water in Red Deer

River up to within a foot of the rails and still rising."

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Lewis. "If No. 1 bridge goes out we will have thousands of people on our hands to take care of till we can move them again. Sidetrack everything else. I'm going over to the roundhouse to hurry up the engines. I'll ride the first section." And, grabbing a raincoat from behind the door, his steps, erratic and hurried, sounded down the stairs.

Ten minutes later, while the downpour still fell heavy and monotonous, the first section of the excursion pulled out, followed by the three others at fifteen-minute intervals. Lewis sat hunched up on the back of the engineer's seat trying to look ahead through the driving rain, as if by the very intensity of his gaze he could clear the right of way.

For ten miles the train moved along at a cautious pace till the engine entered the first cut. Here a little hill had been bisected; the red clay walls stood high above the locomotive on either side. There was a sucking, gurgling noise from underneath the engine before she was halfway through. The exhaust fluttered out in a rapid roar. The drivers were slipping. The banks caved in. The track was blocked.

Lewis grabbed a lantern, jumped down from the cab and ran ahead. The soft, sticky red clay mud struck him to his knees. A hasty glance and he saw that the slide was but starting. Only about twenty feet of the rails were covered, but as he looked up at the walls of the cut he could see the mud sliding in thick streams, oozing slowly down like syrup running from a leaky keg.

There was no time to waste. Hurrying back to the engine, he yelled: "Back up and hit it!"

He climbed aboard, and the engineer reversed and started back. Fifty feet back, the engine ran, then, on a wide-open throttle, rushed ahead through the cut, slipping and sliding, mud spattering from the spinning drivers.

As they cleared the cut, Lewis yelled in the engineer's ear:

"Pull her. We may be able to clear the cuts and the others can follow!"

The engineer nodded. The excursion tore along through the driving rain while the other sections followed close behind. It was indeed a wild night. Although it was still early, it was as dark as though it were midnight.

The electric headlight fluttered, blinked a couple of times and went out. Later they found a bird, blinded by the light, had hit the glass, smashed it, and in its dying struggles, broke the lamp. In pitch darkness, the engine plunged along the wet, slippery rails like a blinded man running heedless through a storm.

There was a flop when the trucks flung mud from the rails, a swish of the drivers spinning through running water, a weaving and swaying when the engine crossed over trestles. Half the distance had been covered safely.

Red Deer River with its two bridges, one above the other, lay just ahead. Once across, the rails climbed upward, following the higher ground where the roadbed was cut through the rocky hillsides. There was not as much danger of slides and no trestles on the other side of the river.

Lewis remembered the message he had heard. "Red Deer River up within two feet of the tracks and still rising." He shook his head gravely.

But Lewis was not the only one who was concerned about the condition of the track that night. Old Clancey McNamara finished his supper and, clad in oilskins, went out, lantern in hand. Down at the tracks he met one of his old section gang.

"'Tis a bad night," he greeted him.

"'Tis that," replied the man, slinging the water from his dripping cap. "Just crossed the bridge above. Water's ankle deep on it now. Been up to the station. They say four sections of the circus excursions are on the rails, the first due along in about thirty minutes. Shouldn't wonder if there'd be trouble to-night."

Clancey asked: "Is any one on watch at the bridge?"

"There was no one there when I passed," was the answer.

Shaking his head dubiously, old Clancey went on up the tracks. The man watched his lantern bobbing along. Before he had

gone ten feet it grew dimmer and dimmer, and finally even the haze from the light was obliterated as the old man made his way toward the upper bridge almost a mile away.

He plodded along, muttering to himself: " 'Tis a serious business, and me own son will be held to answer if anything goes wrong this night."

Nearing the bridge, he heard the rumble of the water sucking and driving against the timbers, sounding loud above the roar of the rain. Clancey stepped out on the bridge timbers. The river covered the rails, and as he felt for the ties the water was above his knees.

"Thank the Lord it's still standing. I'll make me way over to the far side, and if it gives way, shure, I can flag the excursions from up the track in good time for them to stop."

Clancey had almost reached the middle when he noticed the overhead section sagging a few feet. Aloud he thought: "Shure, it looks bad."

He started to advance. Then he saw the side timbers that reached down from above swaying, the water rumbling against their lower faces. He stopped. His breath came in a gasp when an uprooted pine tree passed in front of him without slackening speed. Like a torpedo exploding, the realization burst over him.

The lower part of the bridge was gone. The upper part stood, a false witness, mute, lying evidence as to the condition below.

For a minute Clancey hesitated. He put his foot down and felt only rushing water underneath. The rails were sloping down at an abrupt angle, a death trap set on the right of way.

While he considered his next move a sound came down on him. Looking around the curve, he saw a passenger train approaching. The headlight was out, but the brightly lighted cab and the long line of coaches behind showed up a string of dancing lights, rain blurred, sweeping around the bend.

Clancey, with a wild yell, swung his lantern, back and forth, before him. For a brief second, soul-torturing, a second that seemed like an eternity, the train ap-

proached. Not a sound or a sign that his signal had been noticed. Then he shouted aloud with relief.

A *toot-toot* of acknowledgment came from the engine. A grinding of brakes and the train came to a stop. There was a movement across the bridge. A figure advanced.

He yelled a warning to the man approaching from the other side.

"Wait! I'm coming over! The rails are gone!" he shouted.

Clancey McNamara forgot he was old and stiff. Like a cat he swarmed up to the cross braces of the bridge and crawled over the sagging mid-section. Once down on the other side, he excitedly swung his lantern up into the face of the man who stood knee deep in water, watching his maneuver.

"Shure, Mr. Lewis, 'tis ye, is it?" he called. "'Tis a lucky thing ye stopped, or to hell ye'd have gone by water this night."

A loud grinding crash sounded and the structure lurched. Then as Lewis started to reply, Clancey leaped toward the bank, yelling:

"Quick! The bridge is going!"

Lewis following, slipped. His legs slid between the ties and up to his waist in water he stuck. The bridge was swinging downstream. Old Clancey was a jump ahead. He turned at Lewis's cry in time to see the trainmaster's head sinking under the water.

Dashing away his lantern he dived for the spot. His fingers closed over Lewis's clothes as the bridge, with a slushing rumble, tore from its abutments and swung downstream.

Tumbling over and over, strangled by the thick, muddy water, bruised and battered, old Clancey kept his hold on the inert, limp figure of the crippled trainmaster. Downstream they were swept in the darkness by the tumbling, swirling water.

It seemed like an eternity, that ten minutes the two men were mauled by the flooded river. An eternity of sharp pains, of bumps, and smashes, as though they were being toyed with by some mighty hand. Old Clancey kept his grip on the other man.

Came a time when the motion stopped. Leaves brushed his face. His feet touched bottom, his shoulder rested against a smooth boulder. The flood had flung the two into a quiet eddy. Clancey stood up and lifted Lewis clear.

Yelling in his ear, "Are ye hurt?" Clancey listened for the feeble reply.

"My leg—broken, I think."

"Wurra, wurra, 'tis a bad fix yer in." The old man picked up the bruised and battered younger one and staggered up the steep bank with his moaning burden.

The tracks followed the river here, and luckily, by a fluke of chance, the current had set the two over to the side on which the railroad ran between the two bridges. After a hundred yards of breaking through the dripping underbrush, scratched by briars and sore from banging against the rocks, old Clancey came up to the right of way and set Lewis down. He was exhausted, breathing heavily, yet the excitement of the night served as a whip to spur him on. Now once he felt the cold rails it seemed as if he must collapse.

A flash of lightning lit up the scene in a yellow green glare. In that one glance Clancey knew immediately where he was, so familiar was the section to him.

The low hanging telegraph wires, scarce a man's height above the ground, the gray rocky ballast, the growth of spruce opposite, marked the spot just above the second bridge. They had been carried down almost four miles by the river.

Clancey listened. A heavy rumble met his ear—a sharp crash, the crunch of breaking wood, deadened yet distinct.

The sound could mean but one thing. Number Two bridge was gone out. Clancey pulled Lewis into the shelter of the bank and stumbled up the track to where the roaring of the river increased in volume. A livid glare of lightning serrated above. In its glow Clancey saw the center abutments draped with a matted clump of uprooted trees and heavy logs. Of the bridge not another trace remained.

Hurrying back to Lewis he told him in a few words what he had seen. Here was a serious situation indeed. Eighty-six, the passenger, was due, should be here now.

Was there no way of warning her? The two men were marooned, a bridge down on either side of them. Clancey had averted one wreck that night. How could he avert another?

Lewis, injured as he was, in agony from his fractured limb, groaned aloud, not from bodily pain, but at the thought of the passenger train with its load of human lives running unconscious to their doom. He lay back against the walls of the cut, his face an ashy gray, illuminated by the intermittent spurts of lightning. Above physical pain, the thoughts of the train and a means to warn it surged uppermost. Ah, there was a way!

He clawed himself upright, pointed above to the wires just overhead. "The telegraph! If we can just get in on the dispatcher's wire we can stop the train!"

Old Clancey did not understand how Lewis could accomplish this, but, following his instructions, he climbed up a tree to where his outstretched hands could just touch the wires. Lewis pulled himself alongside. Reaching up, he clasped Clancey's ankle.

Both men were dripping wet and formed a perfect path for the slight current that flowed. The first wire that Clancey grasped he ejaculated a sharp yelp of surprise when the current tingled through his body. To Clancey the little burning electric shocks were but short and long needle stabs, but to Lewis below they were spelling out words and sentences. Messages flowed in those erratic shots of current.

For a minute Lewis held on to Clancey. Then he shouted words that meant no more to the old man than the shocks did. "Commercial code! Try another!"

Clancey grasped another and felt nothing. "Dead wire," came from Lewis.

Another. A rapid shuttle of little bursts of flame tingled through the two men. Lewis yelled: "That's it! Thank the Lord we've hit the right one." Then he muttered: "God, we're too late. It's the orders for Eighty-six. Pull the wire down, pull it down!"

Clancey obeyed. He slung down from the tree. The wire stretched in his hands, sagged down.

"Cut it! Cut it! Got a knife?"

Clancey marked the telegraph line around with his knife. Lewis bent it back and forth between his hands. All the while the little dots and dashes spelled the order through his body from the dispatcher's office to Slabville below, sending Eighty-six on to her doom.

The operator wondered what made the message fade as it neared its end, but his sounder moved, though feebly, and he copied the train order, OK'd it and handed the flimsy to the conductor. Rushing out of the office, the conductor and engineer hurried through the rain on to the waiting train. They were a half hour late already and were trying to make up time.

The engine whistled, the cars moved a few feet when the operator, wild eyed, dashed out and, feet flying, rushed after the moving cars. Just as he was about to grasp the grab rail on the last coach his feet slipped from under him, but in falling his hands closed over the coupler.

With feet banging over the ties and yelling loudly he hung on. In the grip of his hands lay the life of hundreds of people in the coaches ahead. The train increased in speed. The operator, his arms strained in their sockets, was soon done with yelling. He knew he could not keep his hold long. The brakeman, ensconced in the warm dry coach, had not heard those frantic cries. His breath coming in sobbing gasps, his feet numbed from the battering of the ties, the operator was ready to drop off.

But railroading develops quick thinking in a man, and the emergencies of the road generally find the one to meet them. As his fingers loosened through his mind flashed the thought—the air. Holding grimly with one hand, he felt for the shut-off cock handle on that last car. The train was running fast now, and one-handed he could but hold on for a second.

As his free hand felt the bent iron handle a bump in the cross ties caught his toes and jerked his grip off the coupler. But the grim satisfaction came to him even as his head hit the rail and in a spangle of dancing lights he lost consciousness. The whoosh and whistle of pent-up air escaping from the train line was his reward. The slam of

brake shoes clamping on the wheel treads, the shock of a thousand ton of train sliding with locked wheels—all faintly impinged on his mind while the blackness enveloped him.

In a few seconds he came to. A hundred feet up the track the train was stopped. His yell brought the conductor and brakeman to him on a run. He murmured: "Number Two bridge gone. Lewis cut in on the line. Orders—hold Eighty-six." Then he fainted dead away.

Two hours later a searching party who had gone through the woods and crossed the river on the wagon bridge far above found old man Clancey and Lewis beside the passing track at Number Two bridge. They were both in bad shape, but, strange to say, neither complained of his own hurts. Lewis spoke mournfully of the demoralized service when they carried him over the wagon road to the village back from the railroad. Old man Clancey, in turn, only raved deliriously about the terrible condition of the roadway.

Jolting over the rocky road he muttered: "Both bridges gone and no one knows how many tristles. Wurra, wurra. 'Tis a sad night fer the poor section byes. T'will be a month afore the service is resumed proper. A month of terrible work."

But Clancey was mistaken. For High-ball Mac "peeled off his coat and threw his hat away." He was seemingly in half a dozen places at the same time during the next two weeks.

Temporary bridges spanned the river at Numbers One and Two crossovers. Work trains shuttled back and forth, loaded with ballast and cross ties. Enormous crews of men lived in the shanty cars that filled almost every passing track.

Night and day the work went on. The Mountain division throbbed and seethed with hustle and activity it had never known before.

Then one morning, just two weeks after the flood, a blaring whistle sounded at the terminal and the first passenger train since the flood moved away from the station and passed the yard limit post.

It was more than a mere passenger train making a run. It was in the nature of a

triumphal passage. As it crawled slowly over temporary trestles or worked its way around newly laid tracks, yell after yell, cheer after cheer, greeted its progress.

Every work train engine opened its whistle; every workman waved his hat. Highball Mac, his face seamed in deep lines from overwork and loss of sleep, felt a thrill of satisfaction as he rode the engine and passed through his impromptu series of demonstrations. All the work and worry, all the labor had been worth while. The Mountain division was awakened from its lethargy. Five thousand men were as one. Mac was well content.

When the train stopped at the flag station between Number One and Number Two bridges Highball Mac climbed down and slowly walked up the path along the track towards a neat little white house—the home of his father.

A company nurse met him at the door with the words: "He's all right now. Come in and see him."

The son advanced to where the old man sat, feet propped up before the open fireplace. Hesitantly he began: "Glad you're all right. I've got some good news for you and I guess you'll be glad to hear Lewis is getting along fine too, and has been made superintendent of the Branchville division to take the place of Colonel Clarke, who has

resigned. Lewis will be out of the hospital in a week or two now."

Old Clancey replied: "Shure, and it's meself that's glad to hear it, and shure, Michael Emmet, me lad, yer father's the proud man. Two weeks and the trains arunnin' once more. 'Tis unbelievable that ye've done it. And yet when ye think of it, the McNamaras were never second to no man."

Laughing, the superintendent continued: "Your job's waiting for you whenever you get ready to come back. Just consider you've been on a vacation with full pay."

Old Clancey replied by shoving a letter into his son's hand, saying: "'Tis meself that knows all about it. Shure Mr. Lewis has wrote to me not wanst but several toimes this past week. And, Michael Emmet, me boy, as ye can see by that letter, 'tis meself that's the new roadmaster on the Branchville. Thanks fer yer offer, but Superintendent Lewis and meself have decided we would go out on the Lakeland branch and put it in tip top foine condition. With ye on the Mountain division and with two good men like meself and Mr. Lewis on the Branchville, 'tis a grand, foine, first-class division we'll make of it. Besides, Michael, ye run this division as ye started to—without fear or favor. 'Tis not big enough fer the two of us."

THE END

SPRING IN WINTER

IT'S winter, and yet the sun is April glad,
 And the brown snow is melting in the street;
 Even the sparrows forget to be discreet—
 All the world's radiant—and a little mad!
 What use are calendars? Some dull seer's fad,
 A bigotry of seasonal deceit!
 I know the year-time by my dancing feet—
 Winter-allotted days can't make me sad!

What though the hidden winds are great with snow?
 What though to-morrow's fears must wake and start?
 To-day the south's sly little breeze shall blow
 The brimming northern storm clouds all apart—
 You love me—*now*—that's all I want to know:
 It brings a thousand springtimes to my heart!

Theda Kenyon.



The King

By ROBERT D. LUKENS

HE was every inch a king. From the four dainty feet of him, up to the magnificent spiral of horns above his broad and powerful back, he radiated strength, courage and the supreme confidence found only in those who have known all the sensations of danger, save that of fear.

Just now he stood on the lip of a dizzy precipice overlooking a vast expanse of valleys and timber covered hills. His keen eyes searched for and found the strange thing he had seen the evening before. Just beyond the first range of hills, on the bank of a small stream, two moving objects were busily gathering sticks and leaves. One of the objects dropped to its knees and presently a thin wisp of smoke floated upward on the still morning air.

Smoke was a new and strange sight to the King. In none of his wanderings through the upper reaches of the Selkirks had he ever seen man, or man's invention, fire. Fascinated, he stood watching the increasing volume of smoke until a vagrant breeze wafted to his delicate nostrils the pungent odor of burning pine. With a startled sneeze, he backed away from his post.

At the first sound of warning the band behind him leaped to their feet, ready for

instant flight. In the twinkling of an eye a dozen quiescent animals had been transformed into as many bundles of nerves and tense muscles, keenly awake.

The King was not easily frightened. Confident in the fleetness of himself and his dependents, he disdained flight from a spot almost inaccessible and from which danger could be sighted from afar. He returned to his lookout and his followers dropped back to their former positions, their recent agitation showing only in occasional questioning glances in his direction. His calmness soon dispelled even this slight restlessness, and quiet again prevailed.

The sun came slowly over the eastern range, its first long rays falling full upon the King, sharply outlining him against the background of rock. Yet, so still he stood, the eye of a casual observer would have passed him by unseen.

The King was puzzled. During his three years of leadership and, in fact, during his five years of life, he had met and conquered danger in many forms and fear to him was unknown. His nerves might have been likened to finely strung wires of steel, his muscles were of iron, with the elasticity of cunningly woven springs, and his heart—his heart was the heart of a king.

Truly, he ruled by right of might, the only law recognized in the Kingdom of the Peaks. Survival of the fittest, coming under the same head, had produced for him a band of the finest Big Horns that ever scaled the windswept crags of the Canadian Rockies.

From his father, a wise and fearless monarch, he had learned the essentials of leadership. From experience, where a single false move would have spelled death for himself and his subjects, he had added to this knowledge until his judgments had come to be instantaneous, automatic, correct. They had to be.

Came the time when his father met death at the hands of a young and powerful pretender to the throne. There was nothing strange in the manner of his passing. Few monarchs of the wild die of senile decay. They "abide their hour or two" and then, as the battered body crashes through the fir tips below, a new and more powerful leader stalks away at the head of the band.

At the time of his father's demise the then prince had not reached maturity, and any attempt to dispute the title could have resulted only disastrously for him. He was content to bide his time, storing up strength and wisdom against the day when he should overthrow the pretender and assume his rightful title. He watched closely every move of the new leader, detecting errors of judgment and profiting thereby. On several occasions, through ignorance or carelessness, the band was led into danger. All of which rankled in the heart of the youngster who knew.

Six months only did the scepter remain in the hands of the pretender. His reign ended late one afternoon at a point high up on a great glacier.

The sheep were on their way from the lower meadows to the high plateau sleeping grounds. Surrendering to an unaccountable whim, the leader led them away from the beaten trail and across a field of glare ice, where the footing was insecure and a slip meant death. It was a foolish thing to do, and anger flamed in the eyes of the Prince.

Each member of the band probably recognized the injustice of it, yet so bound

were they by the laws of the wild, that not one hesitated. A leader's wish is law and disobedience is unthinkable. One by one they followed, single file, carefully picking their way over the treacherous ice.

The Prince was second in line. His anger was steadily increasing, augmented by the fact that the leader was displaying further poor judgment in setting too fast a pace. A glance backward revealed several of the weaker members straggling along some distance in the rear, unable to keep up with their younger and more agile companions.

Presently, they came to a deep crevasse, a rift opened up by frost action. The distance across was not great, but the footing on the opposite side was steep and slippery. A narrow gap sloping sharply upward between two hummocks of ice, afforded the only landing place in sight.

Without hesitation, the leader sprang into the air, landing safely and scrambling up to the level ice. There he wheeled and stood waiting for the rest to follow. The Prince could easily and safely have followed, as could, perhaps, the majority of the band. But the Prince knew that there were others who could not.

Perhaps it was his slight tempering of the age old law that metes out survival only to the fittest, that later made of him a great leader. Perhaps he recognized and seized upon the opportunity to assert his kingship. Be that as it may, the Prince did not believe in sacrificing members of the band when such sacrifice was not only unnecessary but could easily be avoided.

Stopping dead in his tracks, he faced his leader and sounded his insubordination and defiance across the chasm. Then he stepped to one side and calmly awaited the result of his mutiny.

There was a moment of hesitation and confusion. A restless turning of eyes from one to the other of the great rams. Habit was strong upon them and in the end recognized authority scored a temporary triumph.

A ewe launched herself into the air and alighted on the exact spot selected by the leader. She may have been lacking in strength or she may have been confused by the sudden dispute of leadership. Perhaps

both were contributory causes. She made a frantic effort to ascend the few feet between her and safety, slipped, regained her footing for a second, and then, her feet churning the air spasmodically, she plunged downward to her death.

Another ewe stepped to the edge, eyed the fatal landing nervously and turned doubtfully to the Prince. Something she read in his eyes decided her, and she backed slowly away from the chasm, her head low to the ground.

The Prince turned and gazed up the trail. None there was who seemed willing to tempt the fate of the unfortunate ewe, and all eyes were turned expectantly upon him. His leadership was assured, and he could easily have led the band away with little or no opposition from the deposed monarch. Such, however, was not his intention.

A kingship too lightly won would have been of little satisfaction to him. Then, too, it would have lacked the display of force so essential to leadership, force calculated to impress upon younger rams the futility of questioning it.

Again sending forth his defy, the Prince stepped into the trail and leaped across the crevasse. With two bounds he was facing his former leader, and the next moment they were locked in a death struggle.

For the space of five minutes they fought, the band opposite huddled together, breathing shrilly and nervously awaiting the outcome. At one time the battle threatened to end disastrously for both, with death as the referee. Horns locked, they struggled on the very edge of the slope leading to the depths below. The older ram slipped and would have fallen over, had not the locked horns prevented. The Prince's footing was secure and, to save himself he dragged his opponent back to safety.

But as the other regained his feet, panting from exhaustion, the Prince broke away and made a short, vicious charge. With terrific force he struck. The old ram crumpled up, rolled down the slope and plunged into space, turning slowly over as he fell.

The Prince, now a king, stood silent a moment, himself half stunned from the im-

pact. Then, sounding a pæan of victory, he recrossed the crevasse and joined the band, now *his* band. Majestically he made his way to the head, all moving aside for him to pass, and once more they strung out in single file, following the back track to safety.

Since that memorable day none had questioned his leadership, nor had there been cause to question it. The cares of the band were his cares. At dawn he led them down to the grass flats of the upper meadows and at twilight he headed them back. Sometimes when feed was scarce in the uplands, he took them at nightfall to the lower plateaus, feeding them during the hours of darkness. With the first glow of approaching day he marshaled them back to the heights, where they slept comfortably and securely on the sunny plateaus.

Under his wise leadership no danger of moment had ever menaced. Once or twice he had encountered the unknown and had led them away from the vicinity, quietly, swiftly and without alarm. He kept his own counsel, and none but he knew the reason for these sudden moves. Thus, by shielding them from alarm, he had dispelled most of their natural nervousness.

And now, motionless, a part of the rock upon which he stood, he was facing again the unknown.

II.

DOWN in the valley Billy Rice filled and lighted his pipe as his companion, Jim Brodie, broke camp. Picking up his field glass, Billy swept the surrounding peaks for a sight of sheep. In that ten-inch sweep he covered a distance of three miles, and somewhere in that distance, a sixth sense told him, was the object he sought. Slowly he retraced the route covered by his glass, searching carefully each likely spot. Back and forth, three times, he swept the glass, stopping at last upon the rock where stood the King.

For a moment he searched each nook and cranny. Then he sprang to his feet with an exclamation that moved Brodie to grab for his rifle.

"What's eatin' you?" growled Brodie. "Take this glass," was the reply. "If

you see what I see, we've found what we're looking for. See that big, bald rock up there? Take a squint at the top of it, on a line with the tip of that fir."

"I don't see—" began Brodie skeptically, breaking his remark with a low whistle. "Gee, what a head," he exclaimed admiringly.

"And what a climb," added Billy, as he surveyed the intervening country.

The two men shouldered their packs, picked up their rifles and entered upon a chase which was not to end for five long weeks.

Millionaire, clubman, society pet, Billy Rice nevertheless was a man's man. Money had not spoiled him. His one hobby was big game hunting, and the house on Lake Shore drive was a standing monument to his prowess with a rifle. The five zones had contributed heads, skins and rugs to cover the walls and floor of his den. Until a week before, he had possessed an unbroken record of accomplishing whatever he set about to do.

"Billy," she had said, "I'd like to say yes, but frankly, honestly, I'm afraid of you. You are different from any man I've ever known. You have a cold blooded way of going after things you want that gives me the 'creeps.' I feel like a hunted animal; knowing that you are on my trail, that there is no possible escape and that in so many days or weeks I shall be exhausted or trapped and must surrender. It's maddening to be hunted, Billy, but," and she laughed a trifle hysterically, "this case must prove the exception to the rule. I shall not surrender."

That night he wired Brodie to meet him at Cranbrook.

III.

As the two men left camp, the King backed silently away from his observation post. He had seen the man animal for the first time, the man scent had not yet offended his nostrils and he was unaware of man's attitude toward him. Most of all was he concerned about that mysterious thing that floated mistily up on the breeze, polluting the pure air and smarting his throat. Both were of the unknown and the

unknown, while not necessarily to be feared, must be avoided.

Then, too, some vagrant instinct, inherited from ancestors driven slowly northward by Indian hunters and encroaching civilization, may have whispered that man was an animal to be feared by all wild things. The King turned and glided swiftly away at the head of his flock.

When Rice and Brodie reached the rock late in the afternoon, the trail was hours old. They camped on the spot and at daylight were on the move. The third afternoon they glimpsed the King from a distance of two miles. Thereafter, for weeks, it was a game of hide and seek. Several times they were near the sheep, but only once near enough to secure a shot.

The King traveled in a huge circle, leading back to the vicinity of his summer capital. He knew he was hunted and he became more wary. His wits were sharpened, and never for a moment did he relax his vigilance. He kept his flock moving until darkness fell, and at dawn they were up and away.

Frequently he led them to high peaks, where they recovered sleep lost in the short night stops. In this way, and with good pasturage, he kept them in excellent condition. If the hunters thought to tire him, they were doomed to disappointment.

The King realized this, and no thought of capture entered his mind. Trails there were, too, along dizzy ledges, where no man dare follow. In addition to these, twice he led the band down a seemingly impassable slide when the hunters were crowding him too closely.

It was on the first trip down the slide that the King was made aware of the power of his pursuers to strike from a distance. As he reached the foot of the slide the hunters appeared above. There was a noise, as of thunder, and something droned through the air and ricocheted from a rock near the King. A sliver of rock struck him in the chest. Thereafter, he kept well out of rifle range.

And then Fate took a hand in the game, making this story possible. Five weeks from the morning the King first sighted the hunters a young ewe crashed through a

bubble in the glacial ice and sustained a badly sprained shoulder. She lay where she had fallen.

Again the King overruled the survival law and went back, the rest following. Walking to her side, he paused a moment, then started slowly away. Several times he repeated the performance, but the ewe refused to follow. There was but one alternative left him, and he used it. He prodded her roughly, once—twice, and she struggled to her feet. Urging her forward, he led the band by easy stages to his favorite resting place and there they remained until the following morning.

The delay proved his undoing. From a fringe of timber far below Billy sighted him at sunset, a motionless sentinel against a crimson sky. There was no camp that night for the hunters. Hastily agreeing upon a plan of approach, they separated, to come upon the rock from opposite directions at sunrise.

Success seemed certain. The rock was traversed by a single trail, running north and south. Its front and rear were sheer drops, therefore escape other than by the path looked impossible. Just below the summit on the north trail, was a small pocket ravine, partially filled by a rock slide which might furnish footing to a sheep. Certainly nothing else could negotiate it.

Billy had taken the north trail and was bending every effort to reach this ravine by the appointed time. There was no moon, and progress in the darkness was slow. Pausing to breathe, Billy mentally reviewed the route taken by Brodie.

The south trail was easier of ascent, he knew, but the distance was greater, which would place them on about equal terms. The going was rough and loose pebbles and debris in the trail called for caution. Faint streaks were appearing in the east when he was still a mile below the ravine. Daylight comes quickly in the high altitudes, and Billy hurried forward.

A half mile was covered and he was congratulating himself, when he slipped on a rounded stone and fell forward to his hands. The damage was done. The pebble rolled down the path, gathering momentum and

making sharp little noises at intervals as it struck. Billy cursed softly and fluently. The noise was slight, yet to his tensely strung nerves it seemed that a slide would be silent in comparison. Of one thing he was certain. However slight the sound, sharp ears above would have recorded it, and Billy threw caution to the four winds.

The matter now rested with Brodie, and Brodie would have the opportunity for which Billy had labored five weeks in vain. Still, it would be wise to make the ravine in case the sheep discovered Brodie's presence and turned.

It was lighter now and he made faster progress up the steep trail. Half the distance was covered when, from somewhere beyond the rocks, came the heavy report of Brodie's rifle. A second shot rang out and Billy redoubled his speed. If, in the half light, Brodie's first shot had gone wild, the chances were more than even that his second had fared no better.

A few moments later he rounded a curve in the trail, bringing into view the mouth of the ravine. He was just in time to see a shadowy form disappear within it.

"Too late," he muttered savagely. "Wonder if Jim had any better luck," and he walked leisurely up the trail to meet his companion.

As he came abreast of the ravine he glanced carelessly inside, almost dropping his rifle in surprise at what he saw. At the foot of the slide stood two sheep—one of them the King!

Billy's rifle sprang to his shoulder, but there was no need for hurry. The sheep were trapped. At the man's quick move the lame ewe limped on three legs to a point behind the King, where she dropped to the ground, mute explanation of their tardiness. The King's only sign of recognition was a lowering of his head—a warning.

The rifle sights focused between the eyes of the King and Billy's finger sought the trigger. As he tensed himself against the recoil of the heavy rifle, Fate, being responsible for the situation, again took matters into her own hands. Something of the defenseless helplessness of the pair be-

fore him, and something of the magnificent stand against hopeless odds entered Billy's mind, and his finger relaxed.

The King shook his head and struck the ground sharply, impatiently, with one fore-foot.

"You win, old timer," said Billy quietly, as he lowered his rifle. "You've played the game like a he-man. You've called my bluff and I've nothing to show but a bob-tailed flush.

"If your lady friend were to fall out of your front yard some morning and break her neck, you probably would forget her in ten minutes, yet you would die fighting rather than desert her. Good-by and good luck!"

Billy walked up the trail and the King's head came up, his two steady eyes following the hunter wonderingly. Such tactics were beyond him.

He had been hunted for weeks. He had been startled by thunderous sounds and by droning things in the air which chipped off slivers of rock about him. He had been

cornered like a rat in a trap, and now his captor merely made strange noises at him and walked away—it was incomprehensible. One thing only he understood—before him lay freedom.

Slowly and proudly, as befitted a king, he walked to the mouth of the ravine, where he stopped, the ewe limping down the trail and disappearing from view. Standing thus, he seemed waiting for the homage due his high station and to the part he had played in the game of death.

Some such thought occurred to the man, for he swept off his hat and said aloud: "I'm an American and steeped in the belief that kings are an unnecessary evil, but my hat's off to you. You are a king, and by divine right at that.

"But," and he smiled reminiscently, "you'd better beat it before Brodie shows up. He's different and he's cold blooded. He might not appreciate my softness."

As Billy finished speaking the King turned, pivot like, and was gone.

Perhaps he understood. Brodie didn't.

THE END



THE ALIBI-ER

I LOATHE the man who, when he's licked,
Cries out: "No fair! Behold, I'm tricked!
I've been hornswoggled; fed on lies"—
I hate a man with alibis!

Give me a chap who fights to win,
But who, if loser, pulls a grin,
Then shuts his trap and keeps it so
Till it is time again to go.

That is the sort of bird we watch
And bet on—even if we're Scotch.
We pull for all that sort of guys,
Because they pull no alibis.

Down with the one who bellyaches
And starts explaining when the breaks
Have been against him. We despise
The whining loser's alibis.

Strickland Gillilan.



The Lemonade Sailor

By **LIEUT. C. DONALD FEAKE**

IN Corinto, Nicaragua, there are two ways of starting a riot, and both of them is to flash a thousand dollars in the saloon of Frenchie Saunders, which is exactly what Hammer O'Toole did. He whanged the stained bar with his huge fist, bellowed a command at the Spiggoty barkeep and flashed a soiled wad of greenbacks that might have served as a jackass to plug a hawsepipe.

Hammer was no shrinking violet nor cloyingly beautiful orchid, rather he was a half acre of poison ivy ready for a fight, foot race or a frolic. When Hammer bellowed he put a steam siren to shame.

Frenchie's saloon squats in the heart of Coconut Grove like a toad ready for a leap into space. It leans for support against a pepper tree.

The wrinkled, wadded bills had barely ceased crawling before two evil hearts were beating as one, two minds with but a single thought, and two elastic consciences were being stretched to their almost limitless capacity. Slivers Condell did not lead his

partner, Bill Baird, into crime, rather he had a hot job trying to keep up with his simple co-worker. Baird thought he was so far ahead of Condell that he could taste the Mumm's extra dry champagne that the thousand dollars would buy; but Condell was already getting over the disagreeable effects of it.

Two fine, clean young gentlemen, very clean; in fact, they'd clean a chewing gum slot machine or a blind man's cup. They barred no one nor anything, not even each other.

While Hammer was as unlovely physically as the two crooks were morally, he was honest and if he playfully jolted Slivers one alongside the ear that rattled Sliver's teeth, it was done in a spirit of good fellowship, with which he was permeated.

Had Hammer been sober and strictly himself the two partners would have stifled a perfectly healthy desire to be crooked and smiled it all off and pointed to themselves as twin examples of civic virtue.

But he wasn't; rather he was somewhere

in the clouds, in that place where speech is as unnecessary as it is unintelligible.

Condell screwed a gray eye over a crooked nose and suggested a drink; Baird tried to signal Condell with a wink of the eye, but Hammer put his finger in it playfully.

"Any you gents seen my partner, Heinie Kaboodler? He wuz gonna meet me here—have 'nother one!"

They had another, that is Hammer had one, but the thirsty sawdust drank up two others.

In a half hour Hammer was patting them both on the back and leaning his huge shoulders against them, in another he was bracing his shoulders against some cold cobblestones, toes up, snoring loudly while the twin examples of civic virtue fought over the carcass like sharks over a dead whale.

Again, if you want to start a riot in Corinto, Nicaragua, there are two ways, and and both of them is to flash a thousand dollars gold in Frenchie Saunders's saloon. You can have a riot there with a hundred just as well.

II.

AFTER Condell and Baird had rifled Hammer's pocket they hot-footed it for the water front two blocks distant and sat down over a glass of beer to talk it over.

"Oh, my eye, but that was easy!" Condell grinned. "A cool thousand from that big sucker. Let's go out to the Billy Boy and beat it while the beating is good! I—"

"What's the rush?" Baird queried lazily. "He's good for three hours yet, besides the tide ain't right by an hour. Let's take it easy."

"Listen, brother," Condell hissed. "It just struck me. That was Heinie Kaboodler's partner! We got a buzz saw by the tail! That Heinie Kaboodler is a little bit of an unshirted hell, if you ask me! I ain't never seen him, but if what I hear is only half true we ain't got no time to pick posies! Let's go!"

"What's he look like?" Baird glanced nervously out of the open door.

"I don't know, and I don't want to know, but he must be as big or bigger than that sap back there. He's the guy what cleaned

out Spanish Joe's in Vera Cruz, licked three o' Joe's bouncers single-handed and had a good start on the police force when this big guy we trimmed called him off. I ain't dying to meet this hombre either!"

Condell remembered the playful tap of good fellowship Hammer had given him that had loosened several teeth, and he gauged the mighty Heinie Kaboodler in proportion.

"Let's get to hell out o' here, then!" Baird said suddenly. "This Heinie Kaboodler don't ask no damn fool questions, he just lets a stream o' cold lead bust out. We ain't got no reputation to lose; we couldn't lose it if we tried. Six bells and a jingle! This place ain't healthy!"

"Particular, ain't you, about your health?" Condell asked sarcastically. "A minute ago ye wanted to stick around."

"A minute ago I didn't know anything about this hot lead fever that's goin' to bust out soon. I'll leave you behind if you like?" Baird grinned a crooked smile, gulped his drink down, left the saloon and strode down to their schooner, the Billy Boy, moored to the rickety pier.

He drove the boson out on deck with his black crew; they were all there but the cook. Baird swore great, round, lurid oaths. "Why wasn't it you, you worthless scum!" he flung at the boson. "A cook, of all men, *he* hadda beat it!"

He must have a cook, he knew it, and the knowledge made him more furious. He had tried "home cooking" before; even the black foremast hands growled about it.

He started aft intent on skinning the cook when he did come aboard. Instead he saw a trousers leg from under the gunwale of the schooner's wherry capsized on the deck.

"Ha! The drunken scum, here he is, paralyzed drunk! Come out, you black ape!" He jerked the trousers leg and jerked again. Instead of his Indian cook he hauled out a meek, blushing little white man, almost runty in stature.

"Please, sir, don't hit me!" the fellow begged. "I heard you wanted a cook, let me be it. I wanted to stowaway, I gotta get out o' here soon, I'll go any place you go, only I gotta—"

"Well, I'm damned! Can you cook?"

Baird demanded. "I don't give a damn where you wanta go, can you cook?"

The little man stood alternately first on one foot, then the other, biting his nails, cramming his whole hand into his mouth out of sheer nervousness.

"Yes—yes, sir!" he gulped. "I'm called Sammy the Cook! I am a first rate cook, sir, please—" He nodded forcefully as if to give the assertion added emphasis.

He was small and wizened, and his thin body seemed to be driven by some enormous dynamo of energy that found an outlet only in his nervous gestures and pacings. He had a huge head, on which sat a small cap; sparse eyebrows and prominent Adam's apple.

"I gotta leave here soon," he went on, plucking nervously at his ragged shirt.

Baird regarded the little man fixedly a moment. Then:

"What 'd you do, steal a bottle o' milk, little boy?"

"No—sir—I just gotta leave here," Sammy shuffled his feet, stumbled and would have fallen except that Baird grabbed him.

"Gettin' too hot for you, I guess?" Baird questioned. "Is the consul lookin'—"

"It—it is too hot here." Sammy wiped his forehead again. "I'm an excellent cook, sir, sober and industrious—"

"Shut up!" Baird snapped. "Get up forward and into that galley; ye make me neryous and give me the jim-jams with your jumpin' around!"

"Thankee, sir," Sammy breathed gratefully, and then with quick, little steps he scuttled forward and out of sight.

A few minutes later the Billy Boy was outward bound, having been given a slant by a small gasoline tug, and in her galley was Sammy, taking to his duties like a duck to water.

Baird decided that the fellow had stolen a shirt or a pair of shoes from some one and that he was trying flight to escape the penalties.

When the shore line faded away into a deep blue splotch on the horizon Baird began to breathe freely. He was never completely at ease when on shore; there were so many men seeking him for past jobs that it was a relief to be at sea. Baird

even had a sneaking suspicion of his own partner, and Condell was never allowed to get the edge on him.

In particular he was staying clear of the east coast of the United States; Florida knew him well, as did Havana for his immigrant smuggling activities. He brought into the country the scum and filth of Europe, the morons and diseased, the criminals and froth that the immigration authorities had skimmed off and deported.

He augmented his income with narcotics and rum. All had gone well until a cutter began to chase him, and then three men he was seeking to land disappeared. Only by the skin of his teeth did he escape, and his skin he valued highly, even that on his teeth.

Condell took no second honors from any one; he became a partner with Baird only because no one else would. Between them they owned the Billy Boy. They would have stolen anything that was neither too hot nor too heavy, or was not screwed down tight.

The two crooks did not believe in advertising their calling nor what they earned to any one. The thousand dollars Baird had stowed away, and he even refused to let Condell know where it was on the schooner; time enough for that. Condell nursed a well-founded suspicion that Baird might even try to trim him.

They were stretched out on the after deck, lying flat on a piece of canvas, when Condell spied Sammy diligently peeling potatoes for the next meal. A sudden curiosity impelled him to call the meek, nervous little man to him.

"Hey, there, ole lady, come here!" He grinned when Sammy nearly fell from the box on which he had been sitting. Sammy put down the pan of potatoes, rolled his canvas apron up around his waist and came scuttling aft, his face a picture of dismay.

"H-h-have I—I done anything—sir, wrong?" he quavered, beginning to roll his faded blue eyes, to stumble and squirm.

"Don't you know?" Condell demanded, scowling, "I wanta know what you did back there in Corinto to have to get away!"

"Noth—nothing, sir, very much!" Sammy gulped, fidgeting nervously.

"Now, listen," Condell went on. "You'll spill it or I'll hand you over to the police in Mazatlan! I can't tolerate thieves or criminals on my vessel. What was it?"

"Please—please, sir, don't make me tell! I won't hurt anything, I'll—I'll go right away when we get into port! I won't ever bother you again! Honest!" Sammy uttered that word "honest" from the depths of his heart; to him it was a binding oath. He ran his words together in an effort to get them all out and convince Condell.

"So!" Condell hissed the word. "You are the one who tapped that safe in the steamship office?"

"No, no—no, sir. I—I—" Sammy seemed on the verge of tears. "I took one of the captain's cigars—and he caught me, and—and—"

"Haw! Haw!" Condell bellowed. "Haw! Haw!" He slapped his leg and rolled across the deck in his mirth. "Took—took one of—the captain's—haw!"

"Please, sir, don't taunt me," Sammy said slowly. "I—it's terrible—"

"Hell, yes, Condell," Baird broke in. "This is fierce! Harboring a criminal in our midst!"

Sammy began to hop back and forth nervously.

"Can I go forward, sir?" he asked meekly.

"Yes!" Baird roared suddenly, so suddenly that Sammy leaped sidewise in alarm. "Get to hell out o' here afore ye give me the jim-jams with yer shimmying! Beat it or I'll wring yer little fool neck!"

From then onward, Sammy led a dog's life. The two partners ragged him at every opportunity, baited him until the little chap was half frantic with fear.

He was shy and timid, he stumbled and fell about the decks in mortal terror when Condell and Baird got drunk and began to yell for Sammy to amuse them. His nervous hoppings and squirmings irritated every one, not excluding the West Indian negroes that composed the crew.

Then, to cap it all they learned that his weakness was for perfume, costly French perfume, blatant and powerful.

"Sissy!" Condell bellowed at him one day. "If you don't belay that everlast-

ing hoppin' around like a cross between a lunatic and a jumpin'-jack, I'll wring your neck! You give me the willies and the D. T.'s! Whata ye want—a shot o' hop?"

"Sorry, sir," Sammy gulped, "I won't—I will—I—mean I won't—" Sammy attained the culmination of confusion, stumbled and fell.

"Get out!" the two partners roared in unison.

Sammy staggered to his feet, and ran forward into the shelter of his galley, clawing the air helplessly.

"I'm as nervous as a wet hen with that fool around!" Baird commented. "I'll be glad when he's gone."

Condell was engaged in sullen retrospection, and after a few minutes burst out: "Baird, it seems to me you're mighty suspicious of me! Where's that thousand?" Then he suddenly grew angry. "I want my half! I want it now, five hundred, it is. I'm no baby, I want what's mine! You'd 'a' never put it over on that big dub in Corinto if it hadn't 'a' been for me!"

Baird sneered openly. "Can't even trust me, can you? Not even on the ship."

"I don't trust nobody. I want—" He stopped suddenly, then leaped over the low cabin hatch and grasped the frightened Sammy by the slack of his shirt, and dragged him to his feet.

"What are you snoopin' around here for?" he demanded belligerently. "For two cents I'd give ye the deep six!"

"No, sir, please don't!" Sammy begged. "I didn't mean no harm!"

"What are ye doin' then? Speak up!"

"I—I thought ye was talkin' about turnin' me over to the police when we get to Mazatlan," Sammy answered, his teeth chattering. "Really, sir, I'm sorry!"

"Fool!" Condell snapped. "Get out of my sight! You can occupy more space with less gear— Gwan!"

And so Sammy led a miserable existence. They came to consider him a plain fool, a moron, a weak sister that somehow gets to sea on ships and manages to remain there to every one's discomfiture.

Sammy fancied himself a deep-dyed crook because of the stolen cigar, beyond redemption. He tried to placate the two

partners by unexcelled service and good food, but his attempts only drew ill-feeling and enraged them the more. Before long they were counting the days when they could put him on the beach and get away.

The Billy Boy was reeling off the knots with a stiff, fair wind toward Mazatlan, Mexico, where a little matter of opium awaited them to be delivered in San Diego, along with several Chinese that wanted passage. Baird was eager to invest his share of the stolen money in champagne; too long they had had to be content with beer and cheap rum, and the stolen money was so much velvet, unexpected, and so to be spent carelessly.

They tried toleration of Sammy, then they took to drinking their cheap rum, and next to kicking him around, cuffing him, throwing him portions of their food while half-witted with liquor. All of which Sammy took uncomplainingly, only wishing he was far away from it all.

One afternoon they were sitting up on deck to escape the heat of the cabin. They had been quarreling the entire day over the money. At last Baird, in disgust, went below to get it.

"I'll give you your damned share, only shut up about it! I hope you lose it overboard! Fall in with the police in Mazatlan and have your head knocked off!"

Sammy, who had been passing the after-deck, suddenly stopped and dropped to his knees, his face a dead-white.

When Baird appeared again he held in his hands the money stolen from Hammer O'Toole.

"There! Now pipe down about it!"

Sammy got up and began to limp forward when Condell saw him.

"Ye scut! Snoopin' around again!" He leaped to his feet and caught Sammy by the collar. "I'm through botherin' with you! I'm gonna scrag ye now, and ye can swim to the beach; it's only three miles away!" With that he slapped Sammy a vicious blow alongside the head.

Then, it seemed as if a little corner of hell suddenly descended on the Billy Boy, with Condell in the dead center. The meek little Sammy suddenly leaped into the air and deposited a leather-shoed foot square

in Condell's midriff. Condell let out a roar of fury and swooped down on Sammy, prepared to annihilate him. But Sammy was out of his way and deposited a vicious right foot in his side. Then Baird took a hand in the mêlée, whereupon Sammy, using his feet, began to lash into the two crooks.

"Sorry—sir," he panted. "Dreadfully sorry—ugh!"

Baird had landed on him. Condell sat down hard and remained there dazed. The little man seemed to be everywhere at once, leaping, dodging, kicking up, in the air kicking down, on the sides, from behind, and always his feet were thudding on human flesh.

Baird drew his pistol intent on murder, when Sammy's foot flashed out and Baird fell flat on his back, out of the fight for good.

The negro helmsman now began to take a hand, and Sammy finished him with one blow on the chin. Condell, dazed, was holding his aching head, when Sammy stopped.

"This—this is terrible, sir! Hate to do it—but necessity—no, don't do it, this pistol is dangerous—" Sammy waved a huge weapon carelessly. "I'm awfully nervous—and they make such wicked wounds—" Bang! The pistol went off as if by accident and buried the projectile in the bulwarks.

"Grieved, sir, to have to do this; that's right, sit still till I get my breath! It was most annoying to have to accept your abuses."

The two partners backed away, panting, eying the strange man wonderingly. Even though the muzzle of the pistol was wavering uncertainly, they had developed a wholesome respect for the little chap.

Sammy continued with some trepidation: "Please, sir, go over there and get that piece of small stuff and then lie on your stomach while I tie you. I fear I shall have a lot of trouble—with you both!"

Baird hesitated, and Sammy's finger began to twitch, Baird hesitated no longer, for the muzzle was resting on the pit of his stomach. He sullenly threw Sammy the bit of spunyarn and then placed himself face downward. Sammy bound him tightly. He repeated the performance with Condell.

When he had finished, he lowered the wherry astern level with the rail. He rolled the two partners into it, tossed in a water breaker and tin of hard tack and pointed to the beach a few miles away.

"Awfully sorry, sir, grievously sorry that I must do this! There's land; you're about twenty miles from Mazatlan, you can walk. I'll leave your schooner there for you. Good-by, sir, don't cherish any hard feeling—you—you can understand—"

"Shut up!" Condell raged. "I'll have your skin for this! I'll—"

Sammy lowered them into the water, and as the boat reached the water he tossed in a knife for them to free themselves with. "I—I forgot to state, sir, that I got the thousand dollars—"

"What?" Condell roared, his face a fiery red. "You dirty lemonade sailor!"

"I'm—I'm not a lemonade sailor," Sam-

my retorted defiantly. "I ain't a lemonade sailor, I'm Hammer O'Toole's partner, Heinie Kaboodler!"

"What?" Condell gasped in unalloyed amazement. "You—Heinie Kaboodler?" He stared like a man mesmerized with a stonecutter's mallet, then turned on his partner, maddened by this astounding revelation. "You fool! You—you—hadda pick up a new cook, didn't you?"

Sammy interrupted him. "He didn't pick me up, I shanghaied his cook so I could get his job; awf'ly sorry, sir, awf'ly."

As the Billy Boy filled away two figures in a small boat fell to pummeling each other with curses, while the little boat rocked under the fury of the onslaught.

And on the Billy Boy, scudding away, sat Heinie Kaboodler, erstwhile Sammy, wringing his hands nervously and biting his lips.

THE END



THE PARAGONS

THEY tiptoe in, they tiptoe out,
 Their manners are just so,
 They never stamp or pound or shout,
 And saucy?—horrors!—no!

They say "Yes, thank you," "If you please,"
 Their tones are low and sweet,
 They never wrangle—never tease—
 Like Chesterfields they eat.

They're always far removed from dirt,
 They put away their toys,
 They're never forward, rude, or pert,
 Like other people's boys.

When bedtime comes they go upstairs,
 And oh, how still they keep;
 They never fail to say their prayers,
 They promptly fall asleep.

And are there really known to fame
 Such marvels? God forbid!
 They're just dream children of the dame
 Who never had a kid!

Ella Bentley Arthur.